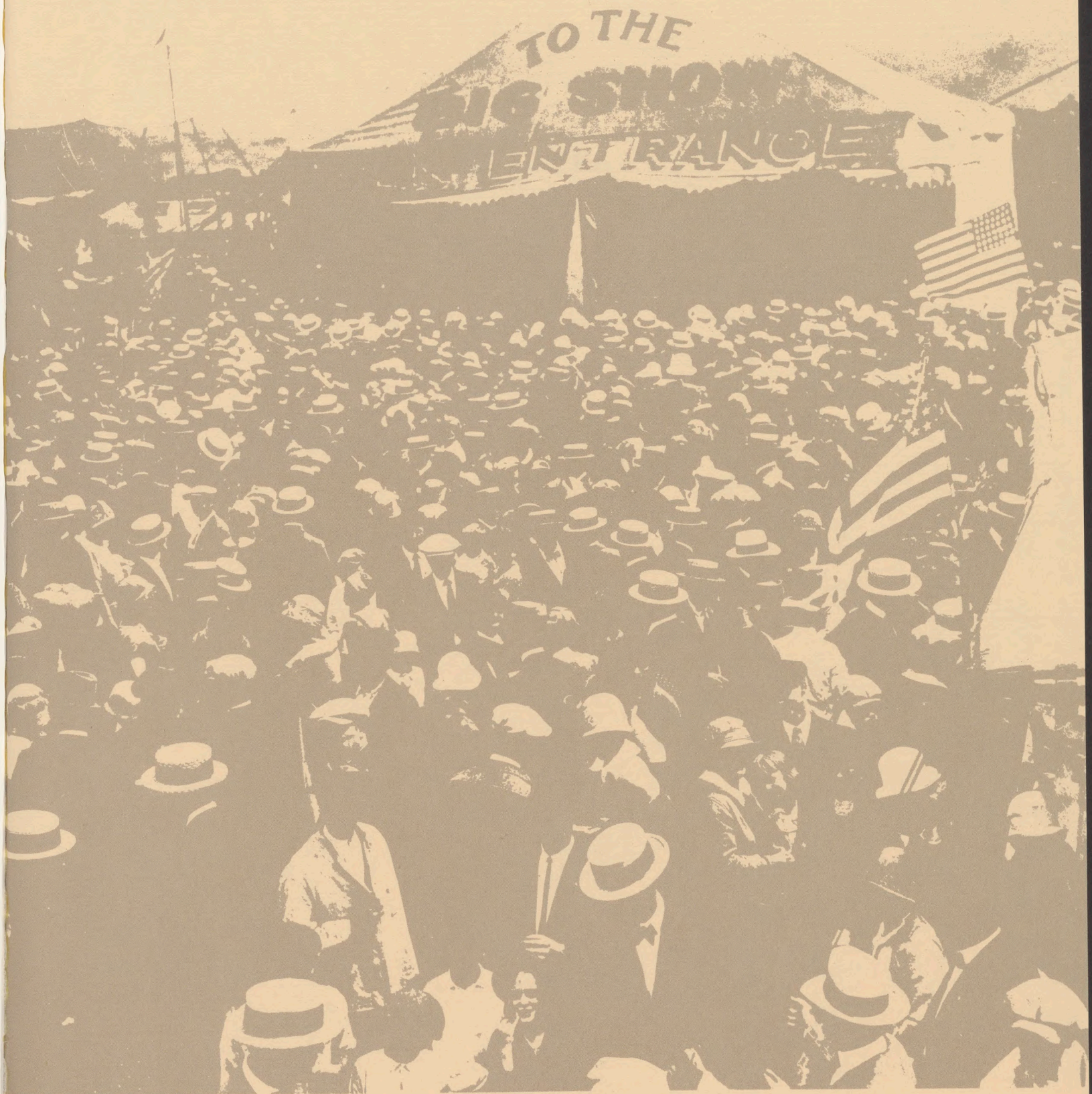


TWO CENTURIES OF CIRCUS ART

CENTER RING: THE ARTIST









CENTER RING THE ARTIST

TWO CENTURIES OF CIRCUS ART

MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM
MAY 7 - JUNE 28, 1981

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August 30-October 11, 1981

New York State Museum, Albany, New York
December 11, 1981-March 7, 1982

The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
April 24-June 6, 1982

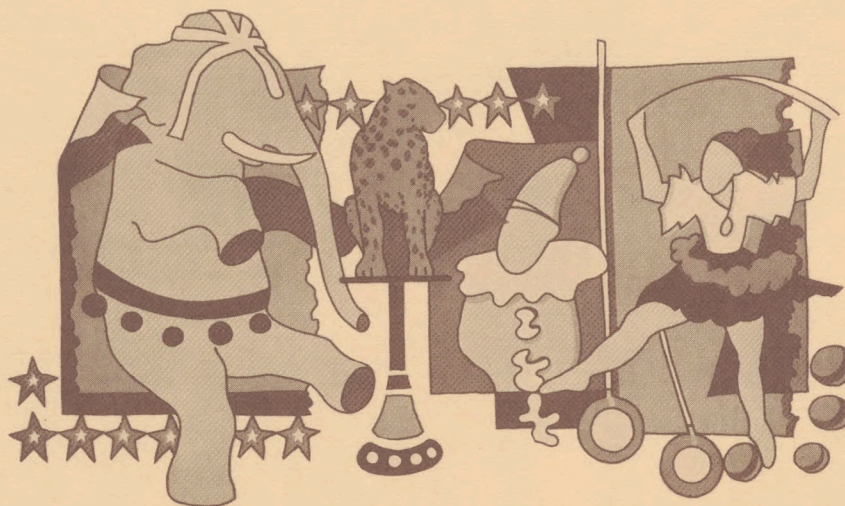


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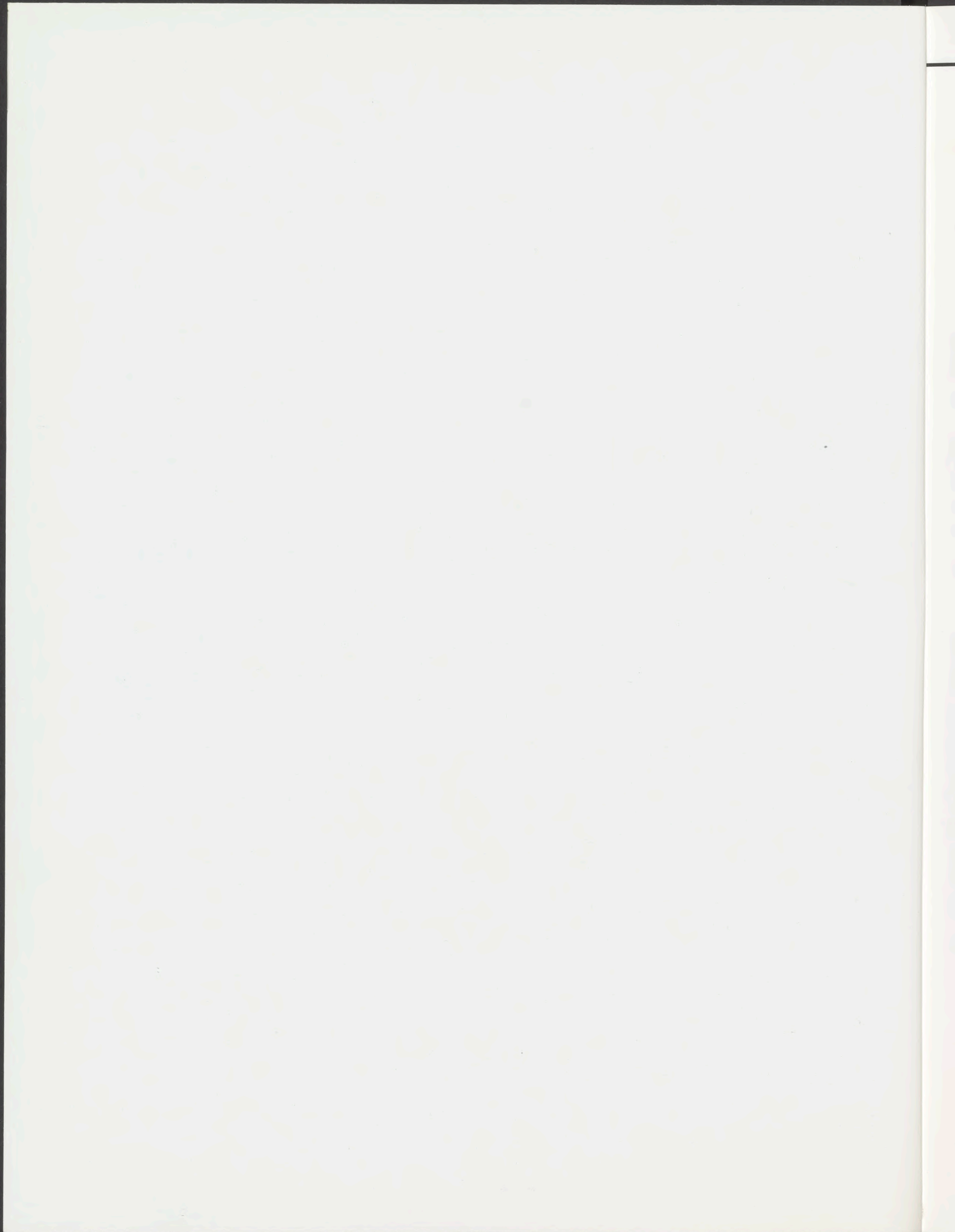
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THE TRULAND FOUNDATION



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FOREWORD

Since the 1840's more than one hundred different circuses have sprung up in Wisconsin, surely more than in any other place in the world. *The Milwaukee Sentinel* has long considered the historic role of Wisconsin as a birthplace of circuses as one of the state's major traditions. The passage of these wagon, train and truck Big Top caravans has been duly recorded in the 144-year-old pages of *The Sentinel*.

It seems appropriate that the exhibition **Center Ring: The Artist** should have been curated by Dean Jensen, *The Sentinel*'s art critic. Jensen has a great love for the circus and has been a continuing student of its lore. He wrote an award winning book, *The Biggest, The Smallest, The Longest, The Shortest*, tracing the history of Wisconsin circuses. It has long intrigued him that so many important artists were fascinated by the circus. Jensen was the logical choice, then, of the Milwaukee Art Museum, when it sought to find a curator for a show which was to examine the circus as a major theme in art.

With the approval of Donald B. Abert, Chairman of the Board of The Journal Company, *The Milwaukee Sentinel* agreed to place Jensen on loan to the museum as a guest curator and also agreed to become the major sponsor of the exhibition. The show itself became the center ring attraction of a three ring promotion of *The Sentinel*'s dedication to reporting of cultural and arts news in the state. Prior to the exhibition opening, *The Sentinel* co-sponsored a Pops Concert with the Milwaukee Symphony, "A Night At The Big Top," at the Milwaukee Auditorium on March 6 and 7, 1981. On May 4, 1981, *The Milwaukee Sentinel* sponsored a Forum for Progress on the subject, "Wisconsin Arts: What's The Picture?"

These were but sideshows leading to the main event, Center Ring: The Artist. Through these efforts—by lifting the flap of the circus tent, so to speak—*The Sentinel* hopes that many thousands of people are introduced to the wonderful world of the arts inside. And as all good circuses of the past, after it closes in Milwaukee, this show will travel on for showings in museums in Columbus, Ohio; Albany, New York; and Washington, D.C.

Robert H. Wills
Editor
The Milwaukee Sentinel



96. James Tissot *The Ladies of the Cars* 1885

PREFACE

It seems particularly appropriate that a Wisconsin museum should originate and circulate an exhibition focusing on circus artifacts and works of art on circus themes. Wisconsin has provided winter headquarters for circuses since the 1840's, and more than one hundred circuses have sprouted from the state's soil, including the earliest forerunners of the Ringling Bros. and P.T. Barnum shows. The Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, a leading circus archive and research center, keeps the circus tradition alive today.

Audiences around the world have been fascinated by the circus for more than two hundred years. **Center Ring: The Artist** focuses on one aspect of that audience—the artist—and examines the spell the circus has cast on European and American artists throughout that period. We are well aware of the circus themes of Daumier, Seurat, Picasso and Calder, but the circus arena has provided inspiration for many more artists; this exhibition represents one of the first attempts to examine the broad phenomenon of circus themes in modern art.

The responsibility for the evolution and development of the exhibition lies with Guest Curator Dean Jensen. Mr. Jensen is both art critic for *The Milwaukee Sentinel* and a noted authority on circus history. The current exhibition resulted from bringing his two interests together. He has very ably guided the exhibition from its inception and has produced a catalogue of interest to both circus historians and the art public. He has been aided by Research Assistant Susanne Voeltz, who contributed unstintingly of her time and effort to the compilation of the exhibition and its catalogue.

An exhibition of the scope and magnitude of *Center Ring: The Artist* could not have been achieved without financial support. *The Milwaukee Sentinel* was not only most generous in funding a major portion of the exhibition but in contributing the time of one of its employees. Additional funding for the exhibition was received from the Wisconsin Arts Board. Corporate and state funding is always encouraging to an institution, but it will undoubtedly grow more essential with the proposed limitations on federal support for the arts.

Through the approximately two years of the organization of this exhibition we have appreciated the flexibility and support of the directors and staff members of the participating institutions. Our

warmest thanks to Budd Harris Bishop, Director of the Columbus Museum of Art; G. Carroll Lindsay, Director of the New York State Museum; and Peter C. Marzio, Director of The Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Gerald Nordland
Director

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For a year or two in the middle 1920's, a Wisconsin circusman named Charles Hall chugged around from one Midwestern tank town to another in a model-T truck filled with performing pigs, a trick pony, a couple of goats, a small Big Top and assorted paraphernalia. In every town where he appeared, Hall would enlist help from town boys in raising his Top. He would then appear in his canvas pavilion as announcer, clown, acrobat, juggler and animal trainer. Following his solo performance, Hall would rattle off in his truck to nearby towns to post bills announcing his circus. He would then return to his Big Top in the early evening, usually arriving just in time to put on a night performance. Hall may have been the operator of the world's only one-man circus.

The exhibition **Center Ring: The Artist** is anything but a one-man show. It is a production that required the talents and services of dozens of stars who deserve center ring salutes.

Our thanks are extended first to Barbara Brown, Curator of Education at the Milwaukee Art Museum, because she came up with the idea for an exhibition that would examine why such a legion of great artists has fallen under the spell of the circus. Great appreciation must also be expressed to Gerald Nordland, the museum's Director, who embraced the idea with enthusiasm and gave us great help and guidance every step of the way in organizing the show. Russell Bowman, the museum's Chief Curator, served as the exhibition's project director and he, too, deserves much credit for whatever success or impact the show might have.

The show may never have become a reality without Donald B. Abert, Chairman of the Board of The Journal Company which publishes *The Milwaukee Sentinel* and *The Milwaukee Journal*, and Robert H. Wills, Editor of *The Sentinel*. Mr. Abert and Mr. Wills agreed to allow Dean Jensen to take an extended paid leave from his newspaper position so he could devote most of his energies to the exhibition as Guest Curator. They, along with other officers of *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, also made the decision to have *The Sentinel* sponsor **Center Ring: The Artist** and underwrite a great deal of its production costs.

Throughout the formation of the show, the Milwaukee Art Museum received great cooperation from the Circus World Museum, a circus research center

and archive in Baraboo, Wisconsin, operated by the Historical Society of Wisconsin. Most of the circus artifacts in the exhibition were drawn from the Circus World Museum collection. We are deeply grateful to the staff of that museum, especially to William Schultz, Director; Robert L. Parkinson, Chief Librarian and Historian; and Gregory Parkinson, Assistant Librarian and Historian.

C.P. Fox, of Winter Haven, Florida, author of numerous books on the circus and one of the world's foremost authorities on the circus, provided us with many creative ideas for the exhibition and was generous in making available prized artifacts from his own collection. Fred D. Pfening, Jr., editor of *Bandwagon*, the official publication of the Circus Historical Society, and his son Fred D. Pfening III, both of Columbus, Ohio, also loaned many important items from their circus collection, which may be the best anywhere in private hands.

Many persons had a hand in shaping the show through their advice on particular works that might be considered for the exhibition. Much such assistance came from officials and specialists in the art museums, among them James T. Demetrian of the Des Moines Art Center; Jay M. Fisher of the Baltimore Museum of Art; John Gernand of the Phillips Collection and Linda Ayres of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; John Freshour and Elena Milley at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.; and Harold Joachim, Susan Wise and Anselmo Carini of the Art Institute of Chicago.

We are also indebted to many art dealers for the enthusiastic support and guidance they offered during the show's formative stages. We would especially like to thank Lawrence A. Fleischman, Kennedy Galleries, Inc.; Bella Fishko, Forum Gallery; Antoinette Kraushaar, Kraushaar Galleries; Pierre Matisse, Matisse Galleries; Sidney Janis, Janis Galleries; Dolly Perls, Perls Galleries; Andre Emmerich, Andre Emmerich Gallery, Inc.; Joan Washburn, Washburn Galleries; Evelyn Daitz of Witkin Gallery and Jack Mognaz of Marlborough Galleries; all of New York, New York. Great help in the show's organization was also provided by Robert Solkan, librarian in charge of the special collections at Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois; Harry Anderson, President of the

Enquirer Printing Co., Cincinnati, Ohio; James Strobbridge, Southbury, Connecticut; Helen R. Andrews, Erie County Historical Society, Erie, Pennsylvania; and Catherine Mishler of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library and Mrs. Clyde Helfter of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, Buffalo, New York.

For special favors, we thank Wayne and Kathy Franzen of the Franzen Bros. Circus; Alan Bloom, Senior Vice President, and Tim Holst, Performance Director, with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus; John Lentz, Sarasota, Florida; Margaret Calder Hayes, Berkeley, California; Richard G. Flint, Rochester, New York; Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Pierce, Baraboo, Wisconsin; Jerrold Rouby and Larry Larson with the Wisconsin Arts Board in Madison, Wisconsin; Myron Kunin, Regis Corporation, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Morton D. May, St. Louis, Missouri; Mr. and Mrs. E. Jan Nadelman, Riverdale, New York; Stephen Browne, New York, New York; Chaim Gross, New York, New York; Byron Burford, Iowa City, Iowa; Ronald Melvin, director of the Terra Museum of American Art, Evanston, Illinois; and Ginny Rogers, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

We are much indebted to Rosalie Goldstein, Assistant Curator at the Milwaukee Art Museum and editor of this catalogue, for innumerable improvements to the submitted manuscript. Her approach to the thankless job of editing was professional in every sense of the word and we thank her for having saved us from many an egregious error. The authors take responsibility for any errors that might remain in the published essays. We are also grateful to Gene Felsch, the museum's Chief Designer, for shaping the raw materials for the catalogue into a publication of graphic beauty. Paulette Cushman, a museum Docent, made a big contribution to the catalogue by providing English translations for reference materials that had been published in French.

All who enjoy seeing the exhibition's billboard size circus posters and other circus works on paper can thank James DeYoung, the museum's Preparator. He prepared all of these rare items so that they could be displayed and shipped with minimal risks. Mr. Felsch is largely responsible for designing the imaginative installation of the exhibition and we offer kudos to the museum's Chief Technician,

Larry Stadler, and his staff for so ably carrying out the complexities of the difficult installation. Too, we thank Design Assistant Jerome Haslbeck for producing the exhibition's stunning poster.

We are pleased to acknowledge the contributions made by Thomas Beckman, the museum's Registrar, who deftly handled the many difficult problems in arranging for the shipment of loans, and Ann Abshier, the institution's Public Relations Director, who handled the publicity chores. We wish to thank Anita Carey for typing the manuscript several times, Susan Marie Kujawa, for typesetting the catalogue, and Joyce Palmer, Mary Ehlke and Mrs. Carey for typing our many letters. Each showed great forbearance in taking on additional assignments that were required for this show. Virtually everyone at the Milwaukee Art Museum had a hand in the production of the exhibition. It has been a humbling but rewarding experience to work with people who carry out their jobs with such professionalism.

Finally, we wish to applaud the real stars of Center Ring: The Artist—the collectors, dealers and museums that loaned works to the show. To all of them, we express our appreciation and our deepest gratitude.

Dean Jensen
Susanne-Christine Voeltz

Mr. POOL,

The First *AMERICAN* that ever exhibited
the following

EQUESTRIAN FEATS

O F

HORSEMANSHIP

On the Continent, intends *PERFORMING* on *Saturday* Afternoon next, near the *POWDER-HOUSE*. The Performance to begin at Half past Four o'Clock in the Afternoon (if the Weather will permit, if not, the First fair Day after *Sunday*). Tickets to be had at Mr. *Gordon's* Tavern, Price *Two Shillings* each. There will be Seats provided for the Ladies and Gentlemen.

A *CLOWN* will entertain the *LADIES* and *GENTLEMEN* between the Feats.

1. **MOUNTS** a single Horse in full Speed, standing on the Top of the Saddle, and in that Position carries a Glass of Wine in his Hand, drinks it off, and falls to his Seat on the Saddle.
2. **MOUNTS** a single Horse in Half Speed, standing on the Saddle, throws up an Orange, and catches it on the Point of a Fork.
3. **MOUNTS** a single Horse in full Speed, with his right Foot in the near Stirrup, and his left Leg extended at a very considerable Distance from the Horse, and in that Position leaps a Bar.
4. **MOUNTS** two Horses in full Speed, with a Foot in the Stirrup of each Saddle, and in that Position leaps a Bar, and from thence to the Tops of the Saddles at the same Speed.
5. **MOUNTS** two Horses in full Speed, standing on the Saddles, and in that Position leaps a Bar.
6. **MOUNTS** a single Horse in full Speed, fires a Pistol, and falls backward with his Head to the Ground, hanging by his right Leg; and while hanging, fires another Pistol under the Horse's Belly, and rises again to his Seat on the Saddle, without the Use of his Hands.
7. **MOUNTS** three Horses in full Speed, standing on the Saddles, vaulting from one to the other.

AFTER which Mr. *POOL* will introduce two Horses, who will lay themselves down, as if dead: One will groan, apparently through extreme Sickness and Pain; afterwards rise and make his Manners to the Ladies and Gentlemen: Another having laid down for a considerable Time, will rise, and sit up like a Lady's Lap-Dog.

THE Entertainment will conclude with the noted droll Scene, *The TAYLOR riding to Brentford*.

Mr. *POOL* informs the Ladies and Gentlemen, that he can only stay to perform once in this Place.

He beseeches the Ladies and Gentlemen, who honour him with their Presence, to bring no Dogs with them to the Place of Performance.

Providence, August 23, 1786.

PROVIDENCE: Printed by JOHN CARTER.

LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Mr. and Mrs. Arthur G. Altschul, New York, New York
The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland
Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York, New York
Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio
Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio
The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Cordier & Ekstrom, Inc., New York, New York
Davenport Art Gallery, Davenport, Iowa
Dorothy D. Dennison, Youngstown, Ohio
Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa
Elvehjem Museum of Art, Madison, Wisconsin
Andre Emmerich Gallery, New York, New York
Forum Gallery, New York, New York
C.P. Fox, Winter Haven, Florida
Goffman-Schur Galleries, Inc., New York, New York
Margaret Calder Hayes, Berkeley, California
Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York, New York
Dean Jensen, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Milner Library Circus Collection, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois
Indiana State Museum, Department of Natural Resources, Indianapolis, Indiana
Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, New York
Kennedy Galleries, Inc., New York, New York
Anne Kingsbury, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Kraushaar Galleries, New York, New York
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Earle Ludgin, Hubbards Woods, Illinois
Lunn Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Marlborough Gallery, Inc., New York, New York
Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, New York
Morton D. May, St. Louis, Missouri
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Mr. and Mrs. Jan Nadelman, New York, New York
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Neuberger Museum, Purchase, New York
The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California
Perls Gallery, New York, New York
Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Columbus, Ohio
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.
Private Collections, New York, New York
Private Collection, Des Moines, Iowa
Pucker/Safrai Gallery, Inc., Boston, Massachusetts
Everett Reese, Columbus, Ohio
The Regis Corporation, Minneapolis, Minnesota
The Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island
Robert Hull Fleming Museum, Burlington, Vermont
Sander Gallery: Estate of August Sander, Washington, D.C.
The Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, California
Joseph Shapiro, Chicago, Illinois
Mr. and Mrs. Avery Sherry, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York
Staempfli Gallery, New York, New York
Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts
Terra Museum of American Art, Evanston, Illinois
The University of Texas, Austin, Texas
Time-Life Books, Inc., New York, New York
Suzanne Vanderwoude, New York, New York
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut
Washburn Gallery, New York, New York
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York
The Witkin Gallery, New York, New York
Richard S. Zeisler, New York, New York

COLLECTION

CENTER RING THE ARTIST

TWO CENTURIES OF CIRCUS ART

By
Dean Jensen



Pablo Picasso *Family of Saltimbanques* 1904-05, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Chester Dale Collection (not in exhibition)

INTRODUCTION

In 1915, the great German poet Rainer Maria Rilke accepted an offer from a friend, Hertha Koenig, to spend the summer in her Munich apartment. There, he saw Pablo Picasso's grandly-scaled *Family of Saltimbanques* (1904-05), today the most famous picture from the artist's Rose Period.¹ Rilke related that he was awestruck at his first sight of the canvas, and he would be forever haunted by its sad-eyed circus gypsies resting in a barren land from their endless wandering. He wondered about the identity of the pathetic fat man in clown raiment, about the younger clown who, too, would someday become old and fat, and the woman hastening the dissolution of her beauty by choosing the rigorous life of a *saltimbanque*. Rilke left Frau Koenig's apartment in fall, but remained obsessed with the vision of the melancholy *saltimbanques*. In 1922, seven years later, he called them forth again in the opening stanza of the fifth of his *Duino Elegies*:

"But tell me, who are they, these acrobats, even a little more fleeting than we ourselves—so urgently, ever since childhood, wrung by an (oh for the sake of whom?) never contented will?"

Rilke's question, of course, is rhetorical. He seems really to be asking the unanswerable: who are we, all men and women, and for whom or for what are we playing out our lives on this place called earth? But should we not ask Rilke's question in the most literal way? Who indeed are they, the eternally wandering acrobats, the clowns, the "brothers of the birds," as the poet Theodore de Banville called them?

They cast such a powerful spell over Picasso that at every stage of his long career he kept reincarnating them in his art. Picasso was not the first artist to have been bewitched by the nomadic players. And the circus troupers are still influencing artists, as we can see from such painters and sculptors of our day as Chaim Gross, Robert Motherwell, H.C. Westermann, Byron Burford, Steven Linn and others. The circus vagabonds have never been great in number, but they seem to have been given a larger position in the art of the last two centuries than have people of any other calling.

Hugues Le Roux, one of the first important circus historians, told us that his fellow Parisians lived in "scandalous ignorance" of the private lives of the skilled artists whom they applauded at the Hippodrome, Cirque Medrano, Cirque

Molier and other tanbark playhouses.² He told of hearing ostensibly learned men say that the circus' freaks were manufactured in factories and that "with a little assistance from the police, one might find these establishments in the thieves' quarters of old Paris."³ We might be amused by the beliefs of Le Roux's contemporaries. But we could ask if Americans today are much better informed about the lives outside the ring of the troupers with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and the approximately seventy⁴ other big and small circuses that are playing today in the United States. Circus people, as a rule, tend to be reticent about their private lives. As Le Roux observed, "The mountebank is too jealous of his freedom to talk openly to everyone that approaches him."⁵

Some years ago, a newspaper carried a feature story in its Sunday magazine with the headline "Circus People Are People." The writer tried to develop the idea that the Big Top's troupers were really not different from the butcher or the insurance man. There were photographs of a sword swallower and his wife relaxing in their Airstream trailer by playing a game of cards, and an Hungarian bareback rider pasting stamps in an album. The protagonist of Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull* would dismiss any story suggesting that, by and large, circus performers are no different than our neighbors next door. We can recall the roguish Krull's reflections on seeing the performers in the mythical Stoudebecker Circus during its appearance in Paris:

"What fabulous creatures these artists are! Are they really human at all? Take the clowns, for example, those basically alien beings, funmakers, with little red hands, little thin-shod feet, red wigs under conical felt hats, their impossible lingo, their handstands, their stumbling and falling over everything, their mindless running to and fro and unserviceable attempts to help, their hideously unsuccessful efforts to imitate their serious colleagues—in tightrope walking, for instance—which brings the crowd to mad merriment. Are these ageless, half-grown sons of absurdity . . . human at all? . . . I honour them and defend them when I say no, they are not, they are exceptions, side-splitting monsters of preposterousness, glittering, world-renouncing monks of unreason, cavorting hybrids, part human and part insane art."⁶

Our theory that circus troupers are of a different breed than ordinary people does not have to rest with Krull's testimony. We have the word of F. Beverly Kelley, author and a long-time press agent and publicist for circuses and theater companies, that circus people are not just people:

"Sure they have families, go to church and do a lot of the things that everyone does, but I truly believe that circus folks are a superior people. They're a cut above the man on the street. Their's is a life where they have to face unusual hardship, adversity and danger, but they have some superhuman drive and strength that keeps them going."⁷

In the United States, at least, there are some who regard circus players as a low species of artist, actors in a degraded, coarse form of theater. They would have us believe that their low estimation of the circus is evidence of their sophistication. But is it not curious that some downgrade the circus as being a puerile entertainment when men who have superior minds—Honore Balzac, Honore Daumier, Charles Dickens, the Goncourt brothers and Picasso among them—ranked the circus athletes and clowns among the noblest artists?

The modernist painter and occasional critic Marsden Hartley, whose admiration for circus performers verged on veneration, once wrote of the impossibility of outsiders like himself ever getting to know the trapeze flyers, the clown balancing a tomato on his bulbous red nose and the equestrienne in chaste white doing somersaults on the back of a sleekly ebon horse:

"I would be very pleased to make myself historian for these fine artists, these esthetes of muscular melody," Hartley wrote. "I should like to be a spokesman for them, and point out to an enforceably ignorant public, the beauties of this line of artistic expression, and give historical account of the development of these various picturesque athletic arts. Alas, that is not possible. . . . The story of [the circus artist] is almost as buried as that of primitive people."⁸

Hartley's claim notwithstanding, the pages ahead will try to shed some light on the question propounded by the poet Rilke: "Who are they, these acrobats, even a little more fleeting than we ourselves. . . .?"



88. August Sander *Circus People* 1930

CIRCUS: A SKETCH

1. Nora (von Wydrenbruck) Purtscher, *Rilke, Man and Poet: A Biographical Study* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950), p. 158.
2. Hughes Le Roux, *Acrobats and Montebanks* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1890), p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Robert L. Parkinson, *Circus Fans of America Roster* (Rochelle, Illinois: White Tops, 1980).
5. Le Roux, p. 2.
6. Thomas Mann, *Confessions of Felix Krull* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), pp. 190-191.
7. Dean Jensen, "Clatter of Wagons Stole His Heart," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (July 4, 1972).
8. Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts* (New York: Boni and Liveright, Inc., 1921), pp. 179-180.



18. W.H. Brown *Bareback Riders* 1886

THE CIRCUS: A SKETCH

Who but the warrior and the holyman among us is so old as the mountebank? The clown, the stuntman and the subjugator of wild beasts that step into the sawdust ring today have descended from long-ago wanderers. If man is instinctively aggressive and god-fearing, as some cultural anthropologists tell us, he may also have an inborn tendency to entertain or be entertained.

"The characters belong to no period, nor to any country," Theophile Gautier said of the circus' gypsies. "They come and go one knows not why or how... they live nowhere."¹ Can we find the poet wrong on any count? There is evidence that the entertainer was on hand, passing a hat and begging for applause, at the ribbon cutting for every new civilization. The clown and the acrobat seem to have been around always. The popular belief is that today's Big Top performers descended directly from the rope dancers and clowns that warmed up the crowds gathered 150,000 strong for the productions Caesar and Pompey staged in the Circus Maximus and Circus Flaminius. But professional risktakers and laughmakers were around even before these Roman carnivals that included the feeding of Christians to lions and battles to the death by the gladiators.

While the present day circus performers carry no papers showing where or when their journey began, we know from wall paintings and reliefs in the ancient tombs in the Nile Valley that equilibrists, conjurers, jugglers and snake charmers were entertaining the crowds at least as far back as 2500 B.C. Sir E.A. Budge, a 19th-century Egyptologist, gave us this sketch of the Egyptian mountebanks: "They were employed at weddings and on festal occasions, and they even accompanied funeral processions to the doors of the tombs, where they gave exhibitions of their skill to amuse the general body of friends and mourners of the deceased."² Budge told us also that the Egyptian entertainers, like their counterparts in the circus today, were an itinerant people who strolled from town to town.

Mimes, jugglers, fire-eaters and men with performing bears were tramping the road in Europe throughout all of recorded history. Life for the nomadic entertainers was severe. They had no position in society nor homes to which they could retire at night. They had to face the ugly moods of the weather and the uncertainty of where they would get their next meal. Still, these free spirits considered theirs to

be the best of lives. The joy one "far traveller" took in his profession is sketched for us in the last lines of "Widseth," an Anglo-Saxon poem dating back to the 4th century that some scholars believe may be the oldest poem in English:

I have fared through many strange lands
Good and evil have I known
But the wandering gleeman are always welcomed
And have the joy of their art.

Since the strolling entertainers survived by the money collected in their hats, they did their best business where there were ready crowds, including the market-places, the ale-houses and, especially, the summer fairs which, by the 9th century, were common throughout Europe. Ben Jonson, in his comedy "Bartholomew Fair," gave us a good idea of the broad appeal of the pleasure fairs. In his words, the Bartholomew Fair attracted "all sorts, High and Low, Rich and Poore, from cities, townes, and countrys; of all sects, Papists, Atheists, Anabaptists, and Brownists: and of all conditions, good and bad, vertuous and vitious, Knaves and fooles, Cuckolds and Cuckoldmakers, Bauds, and Whores, Pimpes and Panders, Rogues and Rascalls, the little Loud-one and the witty wanton." There were few attractions in P.T. Barnum's museums and circuses whose antecedents could not be found in the booths at such great gatherings as the Bartholomew, Greenwich and Southwark fairs in England. By handing the proprietor a penny or a two pence, the fairgoer gained admission to curtained booths where he could see such attractions as pig-faced ladies, Siamese twins, wax works, trained fleas and midgets.

The 18th-century English painter and engraver William Hogarth recorded the jostling fair crowds in air redolent with roasting pig and rife with the cries of pitchmen. While it is clear from Hogarth's *Southwark Fair* (No. 47) that he was as much intrigued by the fair crowds as by the fair attractions, his engraving is factual in many of its details. The daredevil descending the rope stretching from the church steeple to the ground is Cadman, who was to fall to his death in 1740 performing a similar stunt in Shrewsbury.³ The rope-dancer is an Italian stuntman named Violante, and among the banners in the engraving are

those advertising such regular Southwark Fair attractions as Maximilian Christopher Miller, an eight-foot giant, and a stage production of "The Siege of Troy."⁴ John Wykeham Archer's unfinished watercolor sketch of Bartholomew Fair (No. 3) was done sometime in the first half of the 19th century. It, too, shows how these celebrations influenced the physical layouts of such later outdoor amusements as the carnival and the tented circus.

It was Philip Astley, an English cavalry sergeant turned trick rider, who established what historians now claim was the first modern circus in 1768. Performances of fancy horseback riding had been going on at least since the time of the Roman amphitheatres, but Astley made a discovery that was to be the key to the start of the circus ring. He found that by training his horse to gallop around and around in a relatively small circle, he could, by centrifugal force, stand astride his mount and add all kinds of new luster to his performances. Astley's first circuses were staged in an open field he owned in Lambeth, near the Westminster Bridge. He and his wife, also a trick rider, were the sole entertainers in the first ring productions, but soon they started augmenting their shows with mountebanks recruited from the fairs, including Fortunelly, a clown and slack-rope artist; Signor Colpi, a strongman who used his children for props; and a French lady whose golden tresses were so long they trailed several feet behind her when she walked.⁵ After their open air shows, Astley and his wife passed hats for the loose change of the spectators. The offerings were so generous that by 1770, they were able to erect a roofed grandstand for patrons (No. 92).

Astley also must be credited with introducing the circus to France.⁶ The French ambassador invited him to Paris in 1772 to present his "daring feats of horsemanship" to the royal court and he returned there 10 years later to establish the first French circus, the Amphitheatre des Sieurs Astley. In all, he was to build 19 permanent circus buildings, several of them replacements for amphitheatres destroyed by fires.

Nearly all general circus surveys say that the first tanbark production to be seen in America was staged in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on April 3, 1793, and that it was produced by John Bill Ricketts, who had emigrated to the New World from England. However, Isaac J. Greenwood, a meticulous 19th century

circus scholar, insists that "the first full-blown circus" to appear in this country was staged in Philadelphia on August 20, 1785.⁷ Indeed, the 1786 Poole handbill in the exhibition (No. 104) seems to corroborate Greenwood's assertion that Poole was operating a circus in the United States years before Ricketts went into the business here.

If we must strip Ricketts of his accustomed title of "Father of the American Circus," we might confer on him another honorific. Undoubtedly, he was the first showman in America to feature an important painting as a sideshow attraction. In 1797, on the occasion of George Washington's departure from the presidency, Ricketts exhibited in his Philadelphia amphitheatre Charles Wilson Peale's *Grand Transparency*, a painting depicting Washington "taking leave of the Nation and pointing to his home on the banks of the Potomac."⁸ Ricketts himself sat for a portrait by Gilbert Stuart. The painting, which is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., was never finished.

By the mid-19th century, horse-drawn circus caravans were cross-hatching all of America, carrying cargos of exotic animals and dreams. In his reminiscences *Boy Life On the Prairie*, Hamlin Garland gave us a vivid picture of the excitement the circus gypsies occasioned when they visited his small hometown of Grange, Iowa:

"There are always three great public holidays—the Fourth of July, the circus and the Fair. . . . Of all these, the circus was easily of first importance; even the Fourth of July grew pale and of small account in the 'glittering, gorgeous Panorama of Polychromatic Pictures,' which once a year visited the country town, bringing the splendors of the great outside world in golden clouds, mystic as the sky at sunset. The boy whose father refused to take him wept with no loss of dignity in the eyes of his fellows. He could even swear in his disappointment and be excused for it."⁹

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* also painted a memorable picture of the magic that unfolded inside a Big Top of a century ago:

"It was the splendoriest sight that ever was when they all come riding in, two by two, and gentleman and lady, the men just in their drawers and undershirts, and

no shoes and stirrups and resting their hands on their thighs easy and comfortable. There must have been twenty of them—and every lady with a lovely complexion, and perfectly beautiful, and looking just like a gang of real sure-enough queens, and dressed in clothes that cost millions of dollars, and just littered with diamonds."¹⁰

There are several works in the exhibition that take the viewer back in time, and place him outside the 19th-century circus tent or put him in one of the rickety seats before what Huck Finn called "the splendoriest sight that ever was." A.B. Frost, one of the foremost illustrators of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, used his pen to illustrate the stories of Twain, as well as those of such writers as Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll and Joel Chandler Harris. It is a question whether *The Circus* (No. 40) was done for a book or for a magazine such as *Scribner's* or *Colliers* for which Frost worked, but it at least seems a possibility that Frost's ink drawing was a conception for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

The Circus (It's My Turn) (No. 44), William Hahn's charming picture of a group of urchins using teamwork to steal glimpses of the wonders inside a circus menagerie, depicts a scene outside New York's Madison Square Garden. Art historians have established that Hahn sketched the scene when Chiarini's Royal Italian Circus was at the Garden in 1879.¹¹ The German-born genre painter did the painting three years later in San Francisco where he made his home.

While child-like in its draftsmanship, *Bareback Riders* (No. 18) is certainly one of the most endearing paintings of the 19th-century American circus; it is quite as through the folk painter W.H. Brown gilded a childhood dream in his picture. It is interesting that except for one couple seated at ringside whose features are delineated, all of the Big Top spectators are generalized in appearance. Perhaps it is Brown and his lady love who have those prime seats.

Circus Ring by Night (No. 14) by Robert F. Blum, probably was suggested by a 19th-century American circus, but this cannot be stated with certainty since Blum made at least three trips to Europe in the 1880s. Blum was primarily a muralist and illustrator and considered oil painting to be something for which he had little gift. His painting showing an equestrienne bounding through paper hoops suggests that

perhaps Blum was being unduly modest. In its dark, warm tones the painting shows the influence of early J.H. Twachtman and in its ethereal qualities, the influence of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, both of whom Blum knew well.

Bareback Rider (No. 87), the photograph by Harry C. Rubincam, was recognized as a landmark in modern photography by Alfred Stieglitz who reproduced the work in his important quarterly *Camera Work*, in 1905. It has preserved for us a sense of the magical atmosphere inside the Big Top at the turn of the century, despite problems that photographers of Rubincam's day had in arresting motion and working in low light settings with "slow" films.

By the mid-19th century the circus had evolved to its final form, a caravan that came and went in the dust of summer, a kind of Baghdad bazaar on wheels whose gypsy merchants sold for mere pennies adventure, romance, realized fantasies and wonders that could not be bought anywhere else for gold. There was no way to make a circus better. Only bigger. Enter Phineas T. Barnum—with shoving by a couple of Wisconsin men, William C. Coup and Dan Castello. Barnum was fifty-nine, wealthy, in semi-retirement and, in his words, devoting himself to "serious reflections on the aims and ends of human existence"¹² when he was called upon at his Bridgeport, Connecticut, home by Coup and Castello, both experienced showmen. Coup and Castello had conceived a circus that was to be grander in size than any that had yet been organized, and they asked Barnum to join them as partners and lend his name and some financial support to their planned venture.

Barnum had already become known to the world as a concert promoter and operator of museums that bulged with such hoaxes as mermaids and "English druids," as well as such real human curiosities as Chang and Eng, the famous Siamese twins; midget Tom Thumb; and Anna Swan, a seven-foot eleven-inch giantess. Mathew Brady, whose daguerreotype studio was just a block away from Barnum's American Museum on Lower Broadway in New York City, regularly photographed Barnum's freaks (No. 17).

Coup and Castello approached him at the right time, Barnum said later, for he had "tired of doing nothing"¹³ and decided to cast his lot with them. Barnum would later state in his autobiography *Struggles and Triumphs* that his partners



3. William Wykeham Archer *Bartholomew Fair*



47. William Hogarth *Southwark Fair 1733-34*



92. Charles John Smith *Interior View of Astley's Amphitheatre*



114. *The Grand Layout 1874*

were agape when he started mapping plans for the circus that was to be called P. T. Barnum's Museum, Menagerie & Circus.¹⁴ Coup's version of the story—related in his autobiography *Sawdust and Spangles* published in 1901 and corroborated by impartial witnesses—is that it actually was Barnum who balked at the wild dreams and schemes of his partners and “came to within an ace” of quitting them.¹⁵

The circus of Barnum, Coup and Castello, far larger than any the world had ever seen, opened on April 10, 1871, in Brooklyn, New York, under three acres of canvas. The show—featuring such attractions as Esau, the Bearded Boy; Anna Leake, the Armless Wonder; the Eldorado Elf and the Palestine Giant—was a huge success. It grossed more than \$400,000 its first season, traveling from one town to another in what must have seemed an endless wagon train. But Coup, the show's manager, had greater ambitions for the show, arranging to have it move by rail its second season (No. 114). Despite protests from Barnum that Coup's move would lead the partners to bankruptcy, the circus netted over a million dollars in profit in 1872, its first season on the rails.

Following the lead of the circus over which Barnum was titular head, other showmen started converting their wagon shows to rail caravans. The titles for some of the circuses seemed almost as long as their trains, among them Sells Bros.' World Conquering and All-Out-Shadowing 3-Ring Circus, Real Roman Hippodrome, Grand Tournament, Indian Village and Museum, Fair, Continental Menagerie and Pawnee Bill's Famous Original Wild West.¹⁶ A century after the Astleys presented their husband-wife equestrian show in a ring staked off with rope in a field of trampled grass in England, the entertainment they invented had become an institution throughout the Western world.

The circus entered its gilded epoch in France at about the same time that the American circus began its heyday with the formation of the giant railroad shows. In contrast to the big, rumbustious sawdust spectacles in America, with armies of performers and menageries with more animals than Noah's ark, the French circuses were small, rather sedate entertainments. In the 1870's, Paris was the site of at least five permanent circus buildings, among them the Hippodrome which was the setting for James Tissot's *Ladies of the Cars* (No. 96) and those of the Cirque

d'Ete, Cirque National (later Cirque D'Hiver), Cirque Molier and Cirque Fernando. In addition to the circuses that appeared in permanent amphitheatres, there were the tiny, ragtag shows set up by the *saltimbanques* on the boulevards of Montmartre. The boulevard circuses provided the subject matter for both the Eugene Atget photograph of a sideshow exterior (No. 5) and *La Parade* (No. 89) the crayon drawing by Georges Seurat that is a preliminary conception for the painting of the same title in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Unlike the Impressionist painters who liked to be out in the fields at daybreak to see the effects of the sun spreading its gilt on the land, Seurat enjoyed roaming the streets at night, studying how darkness dissolves form. The scene depicted in the drawing is one of the free shows, or “parades,” circus folks staged on platforms outside their tents to advertise their attractions. Seurat apparently had a feeling of melancholy at the sight of the two clowns, the dancer and the pony appearing on an outdoor stage in the shadows of the opulent circus amphitheatres of so much gaiety. His drawing preserves his sad feeling and makes it everlasting.

Among artists, the Cirque Fernando was the most popular of Paris' circus houses. It was the setting in the 19th century for such famous paintings as Edgar Degas' *Miss Lala*, Seurat's *The Circus* and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's *At the Circus: The Equestrienne*, as well as the two Lautrec pictures in the exhibit, *Footit and Chocolat* (No. 98), a lithograph, and *At the Circus: Chocolat* (No. 97), a drawing. The drawing is one of thirty-seven Lautrec did on the circus from memory in 1899 after he had been confined to an asylum for mental patients.¹⁷ Lautrec, suffering from the ravages of alcoholism at the time and two years away from death, did the drawings in an attempt to prove to physicians that he was sane and was being unfairly institutionalized. We get an idea of Lautrec's astounding memory by comparing the two studies of Chocolat, one of them done from a firsthand look at the Negro clown, the other done three years later from mere recall.

The Cirque Fernando was renamed the Cirque Medrano in 1898, but the amphitheatre at 63 Boulevard de Rochechouart did not lose its popularity with artists. Well into the 20th century Picasso, Fernand Leger, Jules Pascin, Jean Cocteau, Henry Miller, Elie Nadel-

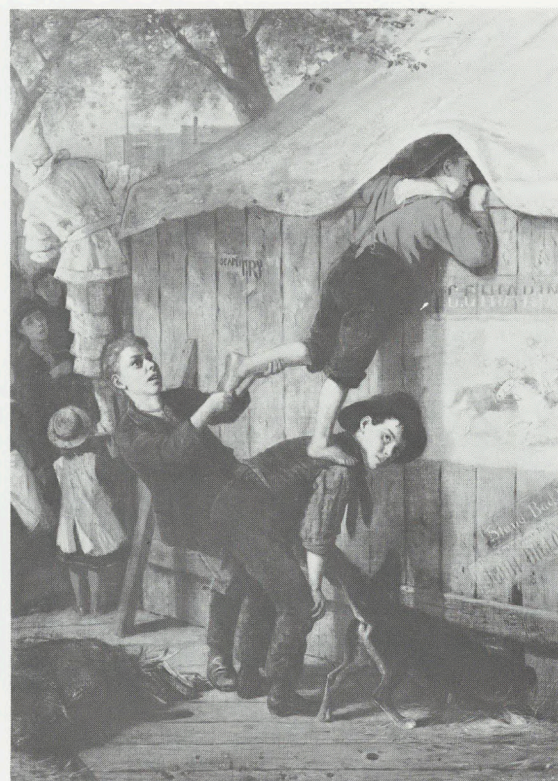
man and Alexander Calder often sat in its red velvet seats. To the pleasure-giddy Parisians of the 19th century, the circus had more appeal than the theatre or opera. At the Cirque Fernando and the Cirque D'Hiver, they could see Monsieur Loyal, the famous horse trainer, Footit and Chocolat and the Hanlon-Lees, an English clown troupe whom D.L. Murray called “the cynic philosophers of the fin de siecle, the unconscious prophets of the crash of its civilization.”¹⁸ But Pierre Bost, a great specialist on French circuses, observed that many Parisians went to the circus to be seen, rather than see.¹⁹ Gathered in the expensive ringside seats of the Fernando each evening were monocled gentlemen in formal wear and painted ladies in raiment more glorious than that of the equestriennes in the sawdust circle.

The circus has known more glorious days than those of present. The Cirque Medrano closed some years back and before it was finished, Paris' other circus amphitheatres bolted their doors for good. The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey show is the only American circus still traveling by train; the other great railroad circuses died somewhere down the track. Most of great tanbark stars seen in the posters and art in the exhibition—among them the aerialist Lillian Litzel, trapeze flyer Alfredo Codona, clown Emmett Kelly and high wire daredevil Karl Wallenda—are gone, too. With the possible exception of the Ringling show's fabulous animal trainer Gunther Gebel-Williams, there is not a circus artist performing today whose name would be familiar to one person in a thousand.

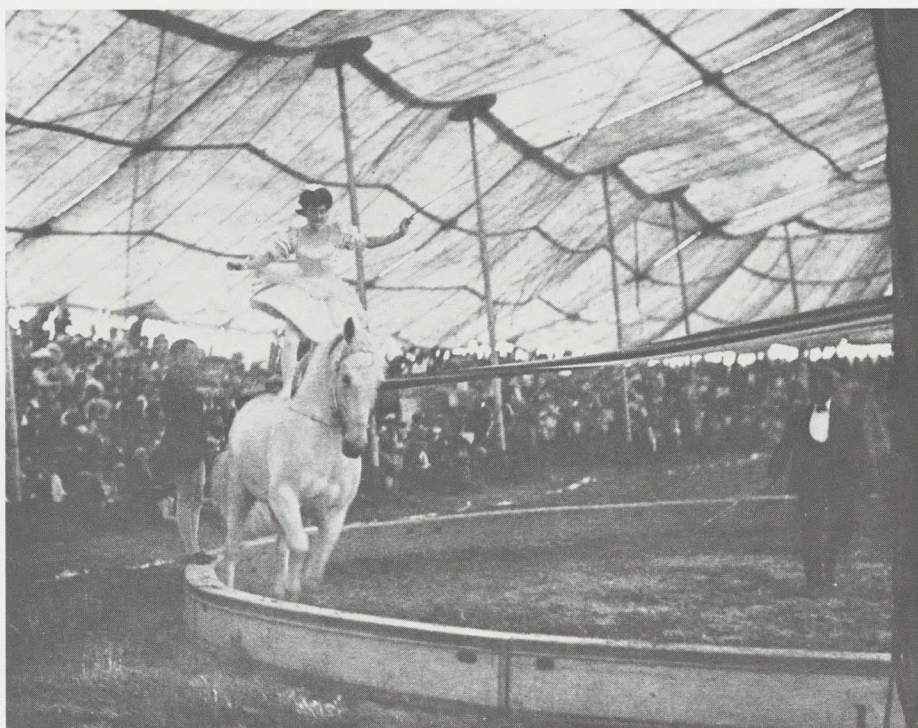
However, Robert L. Parkinson, the chief historian at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin,²⁰ tells us that in one form or another, there are seventy circuses operating in the United States today. Some of the caravans traveling the roads in battered dust-covered trucks will not last the season, but there will be others to take their place next year. Charles B. Cochran tells us that if the mountebanks ever completely disappear from the highways, we will know the day. He wrote:

“If a day came when the Circus vanished from the roads . . . , it would mean that the theatre was dead, the cinema was dead, broadcasting and the concert were dead, or likely to die, because civilization would have finally killed humanity.”²¹

1. Theophile Gautier, "Le Theatre tel que nous le revons," *Histoire de l'Arte dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans* (Bruxelles: Hetzel, 1858-1859).
2. Sir Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge, *The Dwellers on the Nile: Chapters on the Life, History, Religion and Literature of the Ancient Egyptians* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972), p. 127, first ed., London, 1885.
3. Thomas Frost, *Circus Life and Circus Celebrities* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1881), pp. 13-14.
4. Samuel McKechnie, *Popular Entertainment Through the Ages* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co.), p. 42.
5. Frost, pp. 13-57.
6. M. Willson Disher, *Greatest Show on Earth* (London, England: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1937), p. 56.
7. Isaac J. Greenwood, *The Circus: Its Origin and Growth Prior to 1835* (New York: Dunlap Society, 1898), pp. 53-55.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
9. Hamlin Garland, *Boy Life on the Prairie* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1899), p. 203.
10. Samuel Clemens [Mark Twain] *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: The Modern Library), pp. 423-424, first ed., 1884.
11. Marjorie Arkelian, *William Hahn: Genre Painter 1829-1887* (Oakland, California: Oakland Museum, 1975), p. 19.
12. M.R. Werner, *Barnum* (New York: Harper, Brace and Company, 1923), p. 306.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Irving Wallace, *The Fabulous Showman: The Life and Times of P.T. Barnum*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), p. 227.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Undated circus poster, Private Collection.
17. Gerstle Mack, *Toulouse-Lautrec* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 215-220.
18. Antony Hippisley Cox, *A Seat at the Circus*, revised edition (Hamden, Connecticut: Shoe String, 1980), p. 219.
19. Pierre Bost, "Le Cirque et ses Amis," translated by Paulette Cushman, *Le Revue Paris* (March, 1935), p. 169.
20. Robert L. Parkinson, *Circus Fans of America Roster* (Rochelle, Illinois: White Tops, 1980).
21. R. Toole Stott, *The Circus & Allied Arts*, Vol. 1 (Derby, England: Harpur and Sons, 1958), p. 1.



44. William Hahn *The Circus (It's My Turn)* 1882



87. Harry C. Rubincam *Bareback Rider* 1905



40. A.B. Frost *The Circus*



5. Eugene Atget *Untitled*

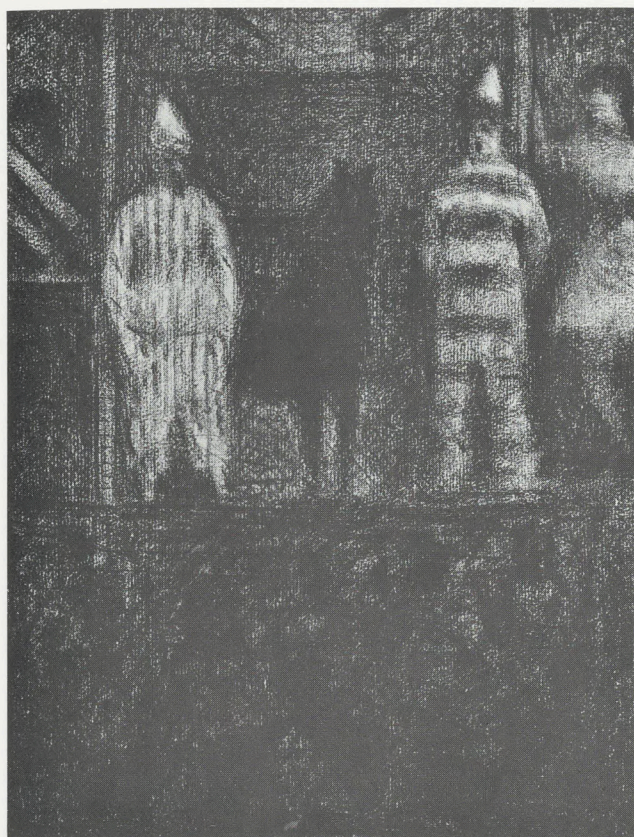


17. Mathew Brady Chang and Eng, *The Siamese Twins* from *Portfolio of Attractions* in P.T. Barnum's American Museum

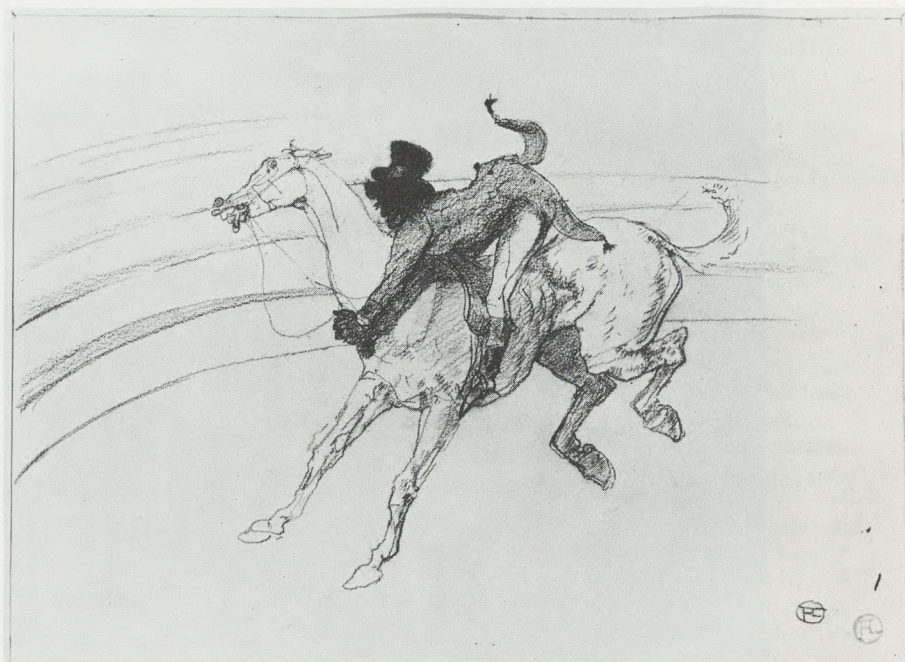


17. Mathew Brady Isaac Sprague, *the Living Skeleton* from *Portfolio of Attractions* in P.T. Barnum's American Museum

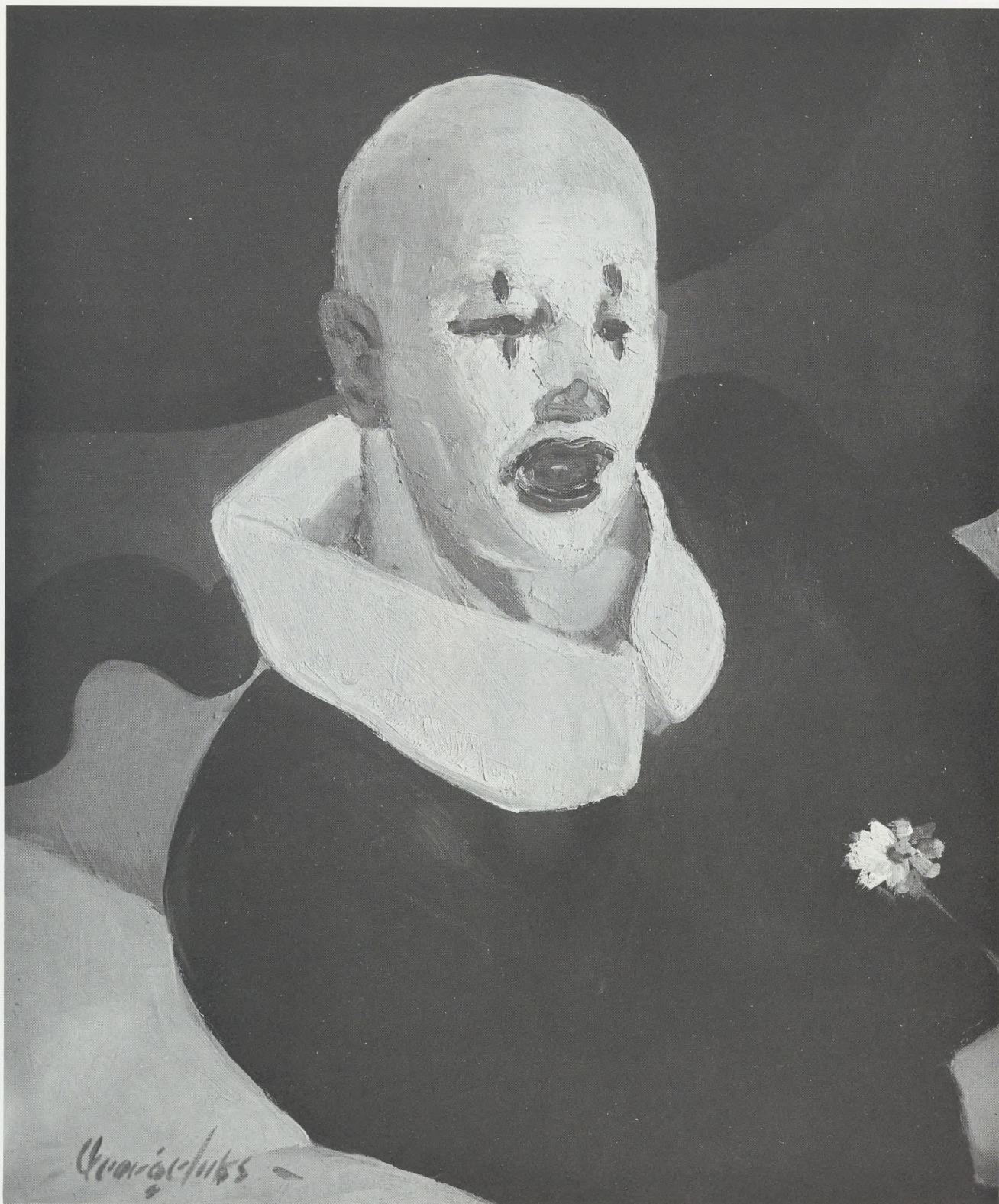
THE ARTIST AND THE CIRCUS



89. Georges Seurat *La Parade*



97. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec *At the Circus: Chocolat* 1899



63. George Luks *A Clown*

THE ARTIST AND THE CIRCUS

Before becoming the darling of Pierre Auguste Renoir, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Edgar Degas, and a successful painter in her own right, Suzanne Valadon performed as an equestrienne and aerialist in Paris' Cirque Molier. And before Camille Bombois was discovered by critics and art dealers as a limner of naive, but altogether fresh and charming paintings, he worked as a circus strongman. H.C. Westermann, it is said, worked as a circus roustabout and equilibrist before he started attracting attention for his sculpture and drawings.¹

There have been painters and sculptors who have come to art with sawdust in their shoes. And, too, there are artists who have divided their talent between the art world and the circus world. Walt Kuhn, who gave us the most unforgettable portraits of circus performers painted in America, occasionally produced clown acts that were so polished they drew high praise from playwrights George S. Kaufmann and Marc Connelly.² Painter Byron Burford locks up his Des Moines studio late each spring and travels with one or another circus, making himself, in his words, "generally useful" as a ticket taker, announcer, musician, truck painter and stake driver.

Can we take a clue from these examples? Maybe they are evidence that of all the members of humankind to whom the visual artist might be related, he is closest to the gypsies of the circus. Pablo Picasso, Fernand Leger, Jean Cocteau and Chaim Gross, among others, have called the circus their favorite entertainment. What is it about the spectacle of silvery shadows and pungent animal smells that has entranced such a legion of great artists? And who are the players in sequinned tights and motley that have won such loud applause from the poet and painter? Honore de Balzac, the Goncourt brothers, Wassily Kandinsky, Marsden Hartley and Henry Miller have all expressed themselves on the question: each regarded circus performers as worthy of placement in the pantheon of the noblest of artists.

There are many who say that the allure of the circus is explained by its appeal to the child in all of us, including, one supposes, the artist. The ringmaster of today's Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus encourages such a view when he signals the start of each performance with the hoary expression, "Ladies and gentlemen, children of all-I-I ages..."

There are works in Center Ring: The Artist by Paul Klee, Henri Matisse, Alexander Calder and Robert Motherwell that are so spontaneous and guileless on one hand and so sophisticated and ingenious on the other that they might appear to be collaborations between an imaginative child and a formidable engineer. The works may bear out Charles Baudelaire's statement that "genius is merely childhood retrieved."³ Maybe there is some truth to John Ringling's claim that "the circus is a drop of water from Ponce de Leon's spring. It takes people back to childhood again and makes them boys and girls again."⁴ But to say that the circus' appeal lies solely in its ability to reawaken the child in man is a devaluation of the artist—he who works under the canvas as well as he who works before it.

Many artists have been bewitched by the circus because of its visual qualities. There is no other pageant that offers the extravagance of color and motion that the circus does. And as Lloyd Goodrich observes, "More than any other kind of spectacle—more than [the] play, opera, musical, comedy, vaudeville or even burlesque—[the circus] uses the painter's own language—the language of form and color."⁵ It also could be guessed that a great number of artists were bewitched by the circus because of its phantasmagorical imagery. The circus is a dream dreamed for us.

It seems fair to surmise, too, that many artists have felt at one with the circus gypsies because, like themselves, the clowns, acrobats and daredevils are nonconformists who decided not to be a part of the ordinary world of slow or no motion and few risks.

The reasons artists have been drawn to the circus may be at least as numerous and various as the works collected for the exhibition. But before exploring the specific reasons why so many artists were enamored of the circus, or the various impulses that lay behind the execution of particular works shown, it might be useful to examine the show's theme of the artist and the circus in the broadest terms. Is there something quintessential about the circus that could at least partially explain why it has been looked to for subject matter by artists as separated in time and concern as Honore Daumier, the primitive limner Camille Bombois and the abstractionists Robert Motherwell and William Baziotis? Perhaps there might be.

The novelists E.B. White⁶ and Thomas Duncan⁷ have observed that the circus is the world in microcosm and, indeed, it does seem to be that. Circus Vargas, one of the largest traveling circuses in the United States, advertised itself in 1980 as having performers from fifteen foreign lands, among them perch-pole artists from Poland, aerialists from Hungary, trapeze flyers from Mexico and contortionists from Germany. Such a melange of foreign elements is not atypical for a circus since it has always been the most international of entertainments. In calling the circus a microcosm of the world, White and Duncan were not merely making reference to its global membership, but rather were referring to the fact that in the sawdust ring, one sees living caricatures of all the people who can be found in society at large: the equestrienne so radiant and graceful that she causes men in the audience to swoon, and the crocodile-skinned woman in the sideshow before whom we shudder in revulsion; the man on the trapeze who can fly like a swallow, and the man in the sideshow who can scarcely move at all because he only has stumps for arms and legs; the blessed and the damned; the big winners and the big losers.

While we might be momentarily dazzled at the sight of a trapeze flyer executing three somersaults in midair at 75 mph and docking with his catcher at the exact split second, most of us might consider his art trifling in the grand scheme of things. However, the artist would see a man pushing himself to the very limit of human potential. Jean Cocteau has suggested that many poets and artists have worshipful admiration for the circus' athletes because they see their own search for perfection reflected in the stupendous skills of the high wire artists, trapeze flyers and other circus performers.⁸

Because the Big Top performers have so perfected their skills, some artists have come to regard them more as gods and goddesses than mere people. The tanbark artists seem to make the impossible possible. If the circus acrobats symbolize for the artist man in his quest for perfection, who represents that side of man which forever prevents him from being perfect and god-like? It is the clown—the personification of hauteur and boorishness, ambition and sloth, naivete and cunning and all of the other contradictions that are part of man's nature.

Geoffrey Wagner has made the keen observation that the clown is the exact opposite of the god-like creatures we see in the ring. "Instead of controlling events, [the clown] is at their mercy,"⁹ Wagner points out. His observation will ring true for anyone who has seen the performances of Emmett Kelly, the famous tramp clown seen in the affecting portrait by Loren MacIver (No. 64). Of all the modern clowns, perhaps only Charlie Chaplin was as brilliant as Kelly in using his art to reveal the ultimate weakness of man. In the persona of Weary Willy, Kelly dramatized how inadequately and even laughably equipped man is for dealing with a world that is, in many instances, completely incomprehensible to him.

In one of his famous pantomimes, Weary Willy would happen upon a peanut, one of the most inconsequential things imaginable. Weary Willy's breaks in life are so few that his heart is buoyed even by such a small find. The clown would then try just about everything in the world to crack the shell of his discovery, finally going after it with a sledgehammer, and ultimately destroying his tiny gift.

We might have been choking with tears, but we could still laugh at the misadventures of the sooty-faced Weary Willy. But there is no way we could work up even a faint smile for the clowns of bottomless sorrow that appear in the art of Georges Rouault, among them *The Little Dwarf* (No. 84) and *Seated Clown* (No. 85). Their sorrow is so great that not even their zinc oxide masks can conceal it. The hearts of Rouault's clowns are weighted with one of the truths of human existence: there is no getting out of it alive. The great literary scholar, critic and translator Wallace Fowlie has given us brilliant insight into the souls of Rouault's clowns in his little book *Jacob's Night*. He said Rouault's clowns were tormented all of their lives by that doubt and fear Christ experienced for a moment on the cross when He questioned whether even He might be forsaken by God. "The clown," Fowlie wrote, "hangs on the world rather than on a cross... dying to it and to himself."¹⁰

The sad clown may have made his debut in art in Antoine Watteau's famous life-size painting of *Gilles*, a harlequin of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. But it may be that the later poets and painters looked less to Gilles as the model for their sad augustes than to Jean Gaspare Deburau, a

beloved clown whose life was filled with tragedy, including his torment at having killed a young boy who taunted him.

Jules Champfleury has left us an account of the last performance of Deburau, who was idolized by Honore Daumier, Theodore de Banville and Theophile Gautier.¹¹ Deburau had retired from the stage at the advice of his physicians, who had told him he was so ill that he would kill himself if he continued to perform. But at the insistence of his adoring public, Deburau decided to make one more appearance. He was so moved by the love and enthusiasm with which he was greeted in making his comeback, Champfleury told us, that "a real tear ran down the flour which covered his face... A real tear in the theatre is so rare... a few days later he died."¹²

The portrayal of the clown as a figure who laughs on the outside while crying on the inside has been done so often in art and literature that it might seem to us to be a cliché. But as Edward Lucie-Smith has observed, one only has to read the accounts of the professional fools—those of Deburau, Chaplin and Kelly, for example—to realize that the melancholy clown exists in real life.¹³ Daumier, Pablo Picasso, George Luks, Rico Lebrun, Walt Kuhn and other artists in the exhibition who have given us portraits of the sad clown were only being forthright in showing us the melancholy, complex person they saw beneath the greasepaint.

While their number is dwindling as more and more of the circuses fold up their sideshows, making up a third important group are the invidiously named "freaks," or as they sometimes have been advertised, "nature's mistakes," "human oddities," "strange people" and phenomènes. The freaks as typified by Diane Arbus' *Albino Sword Swallow* (No. 2), the cast of Byron Burford's *Bally with Ruth* (No. 20) and the microcephalic "pinhead" on the sideshow stage of Reginald Marsh's *Pip and Flip* (No. 66) have the most pitiable lives of all the circus folks. Because of their "otherness," they typically are ostracized not only by the public, but by everybody traveling with the shows from the pony grooms to the center ring stars. The hugely fat Baby Ruth Pontico of Burford's painting and the pinhead of Marsh's picture put their bodies up for sale because that was all they possessed. They knew that their patrons had contempt for them and felt immensely superior to them. Still the

freaks have to do what they do to survive. It is their compromise with life.

Because the clown is the summary of the contradictions of man, he has often been called the representative of humanity. But it might be observed that the circus' daredevils and freaks are representatives of humanity too. In their attempts to make the impossible possible, the Big Top's daredevils seem to capture an essence of man, especially that of the artist in his search for perfection. Like the freaks of the sideshow platform, probably all men have from time to time felt estranged from the rest of the world.

There are some who say that people go to the circus with the hope that they will see the lion tamer eaten alive or the high wire artist dashed to pieces in a fall. Sidney Tarachow, a psychiatrist, offers what seems to be a more plausible explanation. He says people attend the circus because they want assurance that no matter how grim things might be in their personal worlds or the world at large, everything is going to turn out all right in the end. Says Tarachow:

"The circus offers terror, but pleasure in reassurance against the terror. The terror is dramatically conquered for the spectator by the skill and grace and success of the performers... Death is defied and masochistic impulses stimulated in a variety of ways. There are the daredevil motorcycle rider, the high diver into the shallow pool and, most exciting of all, the wild animal trainers. The nightmare is under control at last."¹⁴ Tarachow's observation would back up the experiences of Max Beckmann. In an entry he made in his diary on April 22, 1949, Beckmann said that in the times of his greatest gloom, he went to the circus and was somehow invigorated at the sight of men defeating death. "Through my fascination with risk," the painter wrote, "I became healthy, vital, swelled with strength so that I went home... refreshed."¹⁵

One thing seems riveting about the mountebanks when they are portrayed outside the magic ring, whether in the pictures of Daumier, Picasso, Rico Lebrun, Walt Kuhn, August Sander or Bruce Davidson. Each has a tired, brooding expression that seems to be a badge of their calling. Maybe, as Tarachow and Beckmann seem to suggest, the mountebanks shoulder a burden for all of humanity.



84. Georges Rouault *The Little Dwarf*

1. Max Kozloff, *H.C. Westermann* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1968), p. 10.
2. Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1978), p. 91.
3. Charles Baudelaire, *Le peintre de la vie moderne*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Marcel A. Ruff (Paris, France: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p. 888.
4. John Ringling, "We Divided the Job but Stuck Together," *The American Magazine* (New York, September, 1919), pp. 56-58.
5. Lloyd Goodrich, *The Circus in Paint*, Catalogue (New York: Whitney Studio Galleries, 1929), Unpaginated.
6. E.B. White, *Points of My Compass* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 52-53.
7. Thomas Duncan, "The Counterpoint of the Circus," *Saturday Review* (April 3, 1954), pp. 13-14.
8. Geoffrey Wagner, "Art and the Circus," *Apollo* (London, August, 1965), pp. 134-136.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Wallace Fowle, *Jacob's Night: The Religious Renaissance in France* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1947), p. 51.
11. Jules Janin [Champfleury], *Souvenirs des funambules* (Paris, France: Michel Levy freres, 1859), p. 11.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Edward Lucie-Smith and Celestine Dars, *Work and Struggle: The Painter as Witness, 1870-1914* (New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1977), p. 43.
14. Sidney Tarachow, "Circuses and Clowns," *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, Vol. 3 (1951), p. 170.
15. Erhard Gopel, "Zirkus motive und ihre verwandlung im werke Max Beckmann," translated by Susanne-Christine Voeltz, *Die Kunst und das schone Heim*, No. 9 (1958), pp. 328-331.

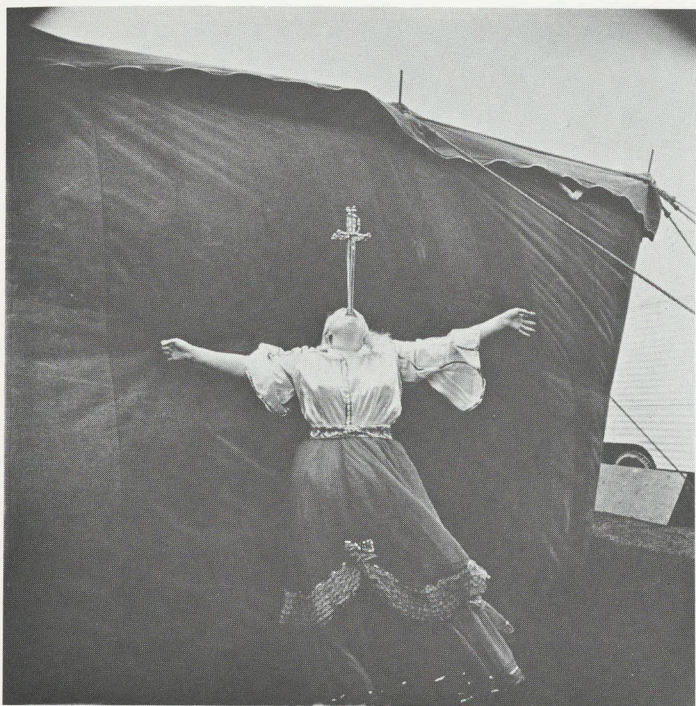


64. Loren MacIver *Emmett Kelly* 1947

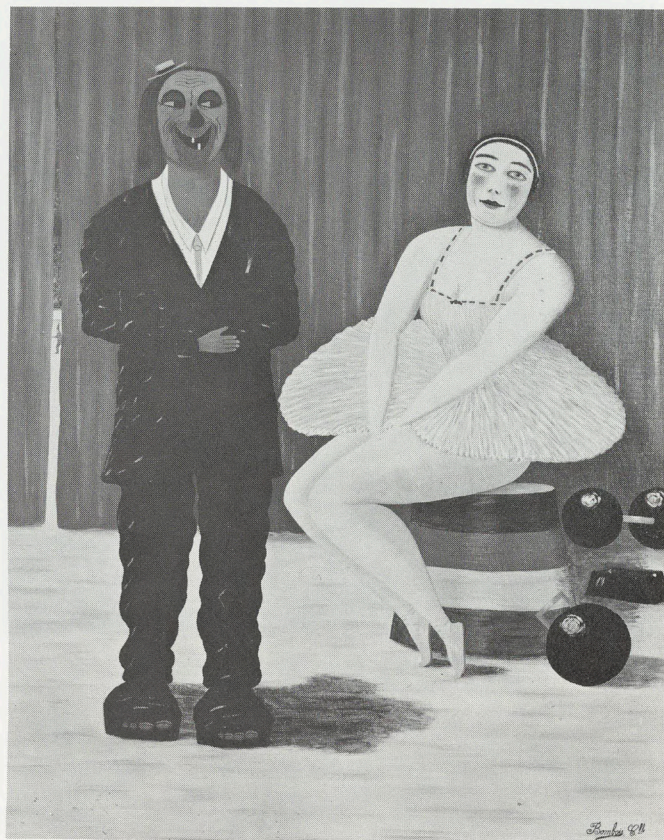


58. Rico Lebrun *Seated Clown* 1941

THE ARTIST AS IMPRESARIO



2. Diane Arbus *Albino Sword Swallower* 1970



16. Camille Bombois *Clown and Dancer* 1935



29. Marc Chagall *Le Grand Cirque* 1968

THE ARTIST AS IMPRESARIO

There are artists who have much in common with the Barnums and Baileys. Like the dream makers of the sawdust world they, too, are in the business of touching things with the dyes of their imaginations and making truths out of myths and fictions out of mundane facts. The painter's canvas or the space with which the sculptor deals can be viewed as an arena, his place for reaching out to spectators in an attempt to invoke in them one or a variety of emotional responses, whether wonder, amusement, amazement, revulsion or terror. The artist seeks to carry out his mission in much the same way as does the circus impresario. He attempts to take control over all of the elements in his work that can affect a viewer's response, such as the subject matter, color, movement, balance and tension. Painters such as Edgar Degas, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Suzanne Valadon and Georges Seurat realized there were lessons to be learned by studying the impresario's skills, so it does not seem surprising that so many of the Impressionists and other 19th-century French painters were often to be found ringside at the Cirque Fernando and the Cirque D'Hiver. At the circus the French artists could analyze how movement, the relationships of colors and the interplays of light and shadow affected their senses and those of others.

Artists of this century, too, have gone to the circus again and again as though they viewed it as a laboratory or classroom where they might get instruction in the language of art. Fernand Leger may have spoken for many artists when he panegyrized the ring in *Le Cirque*, which he wrote and illustrated in 1949:

"Since the earth is round, how can you play square? . . . Life is a circuit. You start out on a journey, but you come back to your starting point. . . . Nothing is so round as the circus. It is a huge basin where circular forms develop. . . . A circus is a rotation of volumes, people, animals and objects. The awkward, dry angle is not at home there. . . . Go to the circus! You leave behind your rectangles, your geometrical windows, and enter the land of circles in action. It is so human to break through limits, to grow bigger, to push out toward freedom. . . . The ring is freedom; it has neither beginning nor end."¹

The great sculptor Chaim Gross said he regarded the circus impresarios as

powerful a force in shaping his artistic sensibilities as any art teachers. Gross saw his first circus more than 65 years ago at his childhood home in the Carpathian mountains of East Austria. His enthusiasm for them has not waned over the years. He writes: "To this day I never fail to attend the circus when it comes to New York. I even go to the little sad ones that come to Cape Cod summertime. I go to watch and I am happy to make drawings after the performance. The myriad movements thrill me no end and one gets inspired to create sculpture, drawings and even watercolors."² Gross, represented in the show by the witty bronze sculpture *Unicyclist* (No. 43), over the years has created enough circus performers in wood, stone, bronze, and paint to fill three rings under a Big Top.

No artist has shown a greater kinship with the circus majordomos than Alexander Calder, perhaps the most beloved of American sculptors of the 20th century. He created more Big-Top-inspired art than any other major artist and even his sculpture, mobiles and pictures that do not refer directly to the circus seem to be infused with its surprise, movements, colors and gay spirit. He once explained his fascination with the circus this way: "I have always been delighted by the way things are hooked together. It's just like a diagram of force. I love the mechanics of the things—and the spotlight."³

The Calder toys in the exhibition—*Acrobat*, *Blue Cow* and *Fratellini Dog* (No. 22, 23, 24)—reveal his Merlin-like powers at taking detritus—old socks, coat hangers and bottle stoppers—and transmuting it into precious objects. The toys were created in the mid-1920's. Calder was in Paris at the time and had started creating his famous miniature circus, a production that was in the making for a dozen years and that is now on indefinite display at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. Mrs. Margaret Calder Hayes, sister of the artist and the lender of the Calder toys, believes *Acrobat*, *Blue Cow* and *Fratellini Dog* to have been sketches for figures in the miniature circus, since there are almost identical toys in the sprawling Calder circus at the Whitney.⁴ We know, too, that Calder made a slightly larger version of the rubber-hose dog as a gift to the Fratellinis, famous clowns at the Cirque Medrano in the 1920's whom Gilbert Seldes called "Three brothers who constitute one artist."⁵

Jean Lipman reports in her book *Calder's Universe* that it was the performances Calder put on in Paris with his suitcase circus that brought him into initial contact with the giants of Paris' art world, among them Piet Mondrian, Joan Miro, Man Ray, Jules Pascin, Fernand Leger and Jean Arp.⁶ Lipman has also made the interesting observation that the many pen and ink drawings Calder did like *The Circus* (No. 25) actually issued from the wire sculptures such as *Rearing Stallion* (No. 26) that he did earlier. Says Lipman: "Calder used lines exactly as if they were pieces of thin wire, drawing nothing that could not have been twisted out of wire. . . . These drawings can be looked at as if they were a wire sculpture flattened out on the page."⁷

It is with varying degrees of success that different artists have been able to emulate the circus impresario in his wizardry in making us see and believe in feats and sights that have no reality outside the canvas pavilion. But in Marc Chagall's *Le Grande Cirque* (No. 29), there is no doubt that we are seeing the production of one who is a master at creating his own order. The most prominent attraction in Chagall's circus is a fantastic creature that is an ass at one end and an angel at the other. It hovers in the air between heaven and earth. There is another nonesuch beast in Chagall's show with the head of a chicken, the tail of a mare and the eyes of a man, an animal that is so huge it dwarfs the fiddler standing on its belly. Chagall reveals himself to be a director par excellence at *Le Grande Cirque*. His performers—men, animals, men-animals—obediently carry out his wildest whims. Nothing at the Chagallian show conforms to our ideas of the forces of nature. The showman delights in defiance of them.

The scene in Milton Avery's *Chariot Race* (No. 7) is less fantastic than that of *Le Grande Cirque*. But the conjuration that Avery used in transmuting mere paint into such a haunting realm is hardly less impressive than that demonstrated by Chagall. While Chagall's picture has the peacefulness of a dream, there is something nightmarish and uncontrolled about Avery's circus where sardonic clowns and elephants storm around the arena as though they have gone mad.

It is the circus impresario's wont now and then to attempt to strike fear in the hearts of spectators. He directs his players to ride bicycles and form human pyramids on the high wire fifty feet above the arena floor. He sends a man inside a cage with

snarling tigers, or presents us with women born with three legs and women born without any legs; men who are nine feet tall and men who are but three feet high. These are his ways of presenting us with life terror's.

It could be said that Avery carries out a similar mission with his *Chariot Race* and this would be true also of such artists in the show as John Graham and Alton Pickens. There is the imminence of violent death in Graham's *Harlequin with Heavy Horses* (No. 42), a hint that the behemoth horses could go berserk in the almost moonless night and trample the clown. The mood is portentous, too, in Pickens' *Acrobat* (No. 82), a startling picture of a hobgoblin out of a nightmare trying to negotiate the high wire in the stratosphere of the Big Top. The monster is all the more compelling because Pickens depicted the creature with almost photographic realism, as though this metahuman might in fact exist. Pickens has no interest in painting the world as we see it. He apparently believes that there is no connection between what man perceives to be reality and what is in fact reality. As he once wrote, "I cannot paint reality for what it pretends to be."

A more recent artist whose work shows this unsettling quality is H.C. Westermann. He seems to recognize in his art that there is another reality, one that might strike us as being as disturbing, mad and bizarre as anything in Edgar Allan Poe's pages if we dared to look closely. By stepping inside the tent of *The Freaks* (No. 103), we can peer into that world of terrors, including those each of us might have about our own oneness in the world. Westermann has made it safe for us to look while keeping our illusions intact. The draftsmanship, outrageous humor and colors of the scene seem to have come out of a comic book, allowing us to believe, if we must, that all that is portrayed in *The Freaks* is unreal and that there is nothing real as creepy and hideous as is shown. Still, in encountering Westermann's human monsters face to face, we sense why Frankie of Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* was stricken with such horror at seeing the circus freaks: "They had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers as though to say, 'We know you. We are you.'"⁸

Throughout the exhibition, we confront other scenes that seem far removed from everyday life. The spectacles unfolding in Anne Kingsbury's *Circus*

Quilt (No. 51) are astonishing to say the least, as we marvel at such impossible acts as two daredevils riding bicycles on a rope stretched between the trunks of two elephants standing atop balls. But the show going on in the 500 seats at Kingsbury's circus are even better than those in the three rings, as we see lovers, animals and people sitting side by side. Everything is preposterously far-fetched and unreal about the world that Kingsbury presents, but the same can be said of the spectacles that unfold at the Ringling circus today.

Neither the artist nor the circus impresario feels compunction to follow the natural laws of animal behavior, anatomy, physics or gravity. They observe only laws of the imagination. And as the poet and painter Anne Ryan once noted, "The rights of the imagination are greater than any other rights. . . . The rights of the imagination are outside the material, the awkward everyday, the insistent crooked wheel of the clock going over and over. . . ."⁹

The circus seems to have been as popular with abstract artists as with those who are realists. By one definition, artistic abstraction is a compressing of perceptions and experience to their most telling essentials. In that sense, the circus may be the most abstract of entertainments.

No artist of his time—and, arguably, no artist after his time—used the abstractionist's language more eloquently than did Henri Matisse. The Matisse works in the exhibition, *Sword Swallower* and *The Codomas* (No. 67), are stenciled lithographs that were included with sixteen other such illustrations in *Jazz*, an album published in 1947 in an edition of 250. *Sword Swallower* and *The Codomas*, like the other *Jazz* illustrations, appeared in their earliest form as *papiers découpés*, or paper cutouts. In creating the original works, Matisse snipped his desired forms from hand-colored paper and then played with the cutouts until he achieved the effect he wanted in the relationships of the colors and shapes of the pieces. About half of the illustrations in *Jazz* have circus themes, with the others being what Matisse called "crystallizations" of his remembrances of popular tales and his travels. He explained why he chose the title *Jazz* for the suite: "It's not enough to place colors, however beautiful, one beside the other; colors must react to one another. Otherwise you have cacophony. Jazz is rhythm and meaning."¹⁰ It is likely that *The Codomas* was inspired by the Flying Codonas, a famous American

trapeze troupe that regularly appeared at Paris' Cirque Medrano and the Cirque D'Hiver in the 1930's in the winter months when it was not touring with the Ringling circus.

Romare Bearden's *The Circus* (No. 12), which was also done with paper cutouts, might have been suggested by Matisse's circus works. It is interesting that, like Matisse, Bearden used squares of paper to describe the seating sections as they might appear to his trapeze performers working near the ceiling of the Big Top.

Henry Miller may have given us insight as to why the clown has been a favorite entertainer of so many artists. In two short sentences, Miller may have written the equivalent of a book on the clown's art: "A clown is a poem in action. He is the story he enacts."¹¹ In their roles as impresarios, the abstractionists Robert Motherwell, Byron Browne, Kenneth Noland and Hans Hofmann have set out clowns onto the stage and the augustes have allowed the artists full freedom of direction.

Motherwell has put on a rather astounding show of legerdemain with his *Three Clowns* (No. 71). He made this trio with so much elegance, style and gentle wit materialize from almost nothing, probably less than a penny's worth of paint and a few rather offhandedly drawn circles and triangles.

In the maelstrom of forms and riot of colors in Browne's *Two Clowns* (No. 19), it is possible to clearly make out only one jester through the figure's cap and bells. In choosing the title, Browne may have seen himself as the other prankster.

Noland, too, shows a waggish streak in his *Clown* (No. 75), a canvas conforming to his widely admired paintings of concentric circles, save for the fact that this one has been decorated with eyes, nose and a mouth. When Noland's circle paintings first appeared in 1958, the artist drew wide critical notice for his concern with the primacy of color and structure in art. In desanctifying his own creation by dabbing facial characteristics on one of the paintings, Noland may have taken a cue from Marcel Duchamp, who as long ago as 1919 had the audacity to draw a mustache and a goatee on a reproduction of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and title his act of graffiti, *L.H.O.O.Q.*

Whereas Noland's *Clown* might be viewed as a figurative work that metamorphosed from a nonobjective subject, Hofmann's *Pierrot* (No. 46) could be seen



41. Lee Gatch *The Acrobat* 1960

as nonobjective work that issued from a figurative subject. Hofmann must have used a clown figure as his point of departure, but in the genesis of the work, all explicit references to the pierrot dropped away.

Marsden Hartley has suggested that the artist views the circus performers as paintings and sculpture in action:

"The acrobat certainly has line and mass to think of, even if this is not his primal concern. He knows how to decorate the space in which he operates. . . . He achieves great plastic beauty with economy of means. He dispenses with all superfluous gesture. . . ." ¹² Hartley, one could guess, would applaud the performances put on by Fernand Leger's *Two Acrobats*, Paul Klee's *Tightrope Walker*, Mary Callery's *Equilibrists*, Lee Gatch's *Acrobat*, and Max Weber's *Acrobats*.

In his painting, *The Two Acrobats* (No. 59), Leger revealed himself to be an impresario who would not allow his performers to steal the show from him. There is much that is amusing in the picture's welter of hands and feet, but the acrobats themselves appear to be automatons. They are devoid of their own personalities or expressive characteristics. Leger has employed the performers only to explore his own ideas about space and dynamism in composition. By the early 1940's when Leger painted *The Two Acrobats*, he had come to the conclusion that advances in modern art would be impeded as long as pictures were dominated by human figures with sentimental associations. He believed the human body had no place in modern painting except as an object. He wrote: "We arrive at our own epoch. The subject is no longer the leading character; a new element, the object, replaces it. At this moment, to the mind of the modern artist, a cloud, a machine, a tree are elements as interesting as people or faces." ¹³

Leger also believed that artists who had come to dead ends in their explorations would do better to look for inspiration in life around them rather than carrying out searches for new ideas in the museums. Commenting on the artists who were troubled by creative blocks, he wrote:

"Why won't they accept the lesson of the acrobats, the simple, humble acrobats? There are more 'plastic passages' in ten

minutes of an acrobatic spectacle than there are in many scenes of ballet." ¹⁴ *The Two Acrobats* is one of the earliest paintings in which Leger created bands and circles of pure color to suggest space and motion without regard to the outlines of his forms. Leger's idea to use color in this more or less arbitrary way came not from a visit to the circus, but rather from a stroll one night in New York City, which he called "the most colossal spectacle in the world." ¹⁵ He described the experience this way: "In 1942, in the streets of New York—on Broadway, to be exact—I was struck by the colored lights that the advertisements flash on the streets. I was talking with someone. His face was blue: twenty seconds later it turned yellow. That color went, another came, and it turned red, then green. . . . That color, the color of the flashing lights, was free—free in space. I tried to do the same thing in my pictures." ¹⁶

To use Sir John Read's famous description of Klee's art, in his *Tightrope Walker* (No. 52) the Swiss-born painter simply went "for walk with a line" to create a powerful image heavy with psychological implications concerning man's fears of the unknown, being alone, failure and violent death.

Callery's *Equilibrists* (No. 27), created from lengths of polychromed steel, appear to be in such precarious balance that the figures might be toppled by a puff of wind. Great tension exists within the lines of the linear figures. Callery's rope walkers appear to be making a journey that is treacherous every step of the way—an illusion she has created by arresting significant gestures in her figures.

Gatch's canvas collage, *Acrobat* (No. 41) represents something of a departure for an artist whose works were most often expressions of his mystical feelings toward nature. But Gatch's widow, the painter Elsie Driggs, reports that he had always had an abounding love for the circus, especially the small tented shows that in his boyhood rolled through the countryside in caravans of horse-drawn wagons. Gatch was an artist who strove for equilibrium in all elements of his art—color, form, light and texture. It is natural that he should have been drawn to the acrobat, another artist who seeks to maintain perfect balance when in the public eye. The figure in the foreground of *Acrobat* has made appearances in a few other Gatch works and apparently is intended to represent us, the spectators, at

Gatch's fine show.

The painting *Acrobats* (No. 102) serves as a good summation of Weber's considerable gifts. Through his masterful handling of color alone, Weber created an illusion of the great space of the Big Top and its peculiar jadeite lights and shadows. The viewer's eye shifts from the acrobats in the foreground to those in the background to those at rarefied levels, so that one senses great movement in the scene. Too, there is a kind of optical music in the painting—one that suggests the razzmatazz of a circus band—because Weber has drawn his performers somewhat in the form of musical notes and has arrayed them helter-skelter on staff-like lines.

One might assume that William Baziotes' *Circus Abstraction* (No. 8), like other Baziotes pictures from the same period, evolved on canvas almost without conscious involvement by the artist. Baziotes was much influenced by the theory of some Surrealists that important motifs spring from the unconscious mind through the process of automatic painting. In explaining his own work method, Baziotes said he started his paintings without having any idea of their outcome and looked for clues in his first brush strokes on how to proceed. "Once I sense the suggestion," he wrote, "I begin to paint intuitively. The suggestion then becomes a phantom that must be caught and made real. As I work, or when the painting is finished, the subject reveals itself." ¹⁷ Baziotes said further that "what happens on canvas is unpredictable and surprising to me." In that sense, then, Baziotes was not only the impresario producer for *Circus Abstraction*, but also a spectator, one for whom the performance was staged. The faintly glowing colors of Baziotes' painting suggest stained glass layered with dust. The picture does not describe the superficial reality of a circus, except, perhaps, in its vaguely pyramidal forms which might be tents and in the circles which could be sawdust rings. This is what sometimes happens with things that were once vividly experienced as they recede further in the recesses of memory. They are reshaped and gloom gathers ever thicker around them.

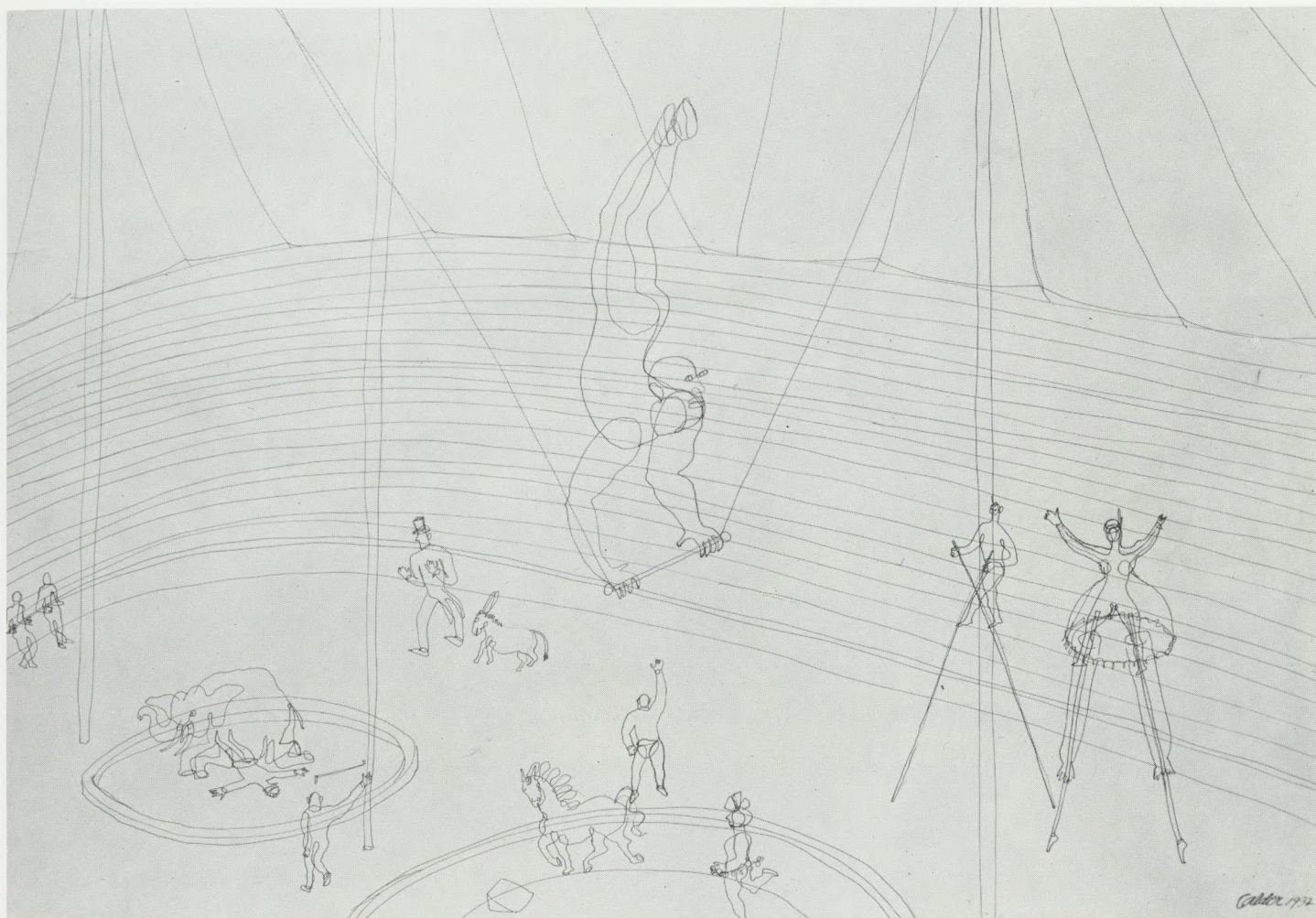


19. Byron Browne *Two Clowns* 1948

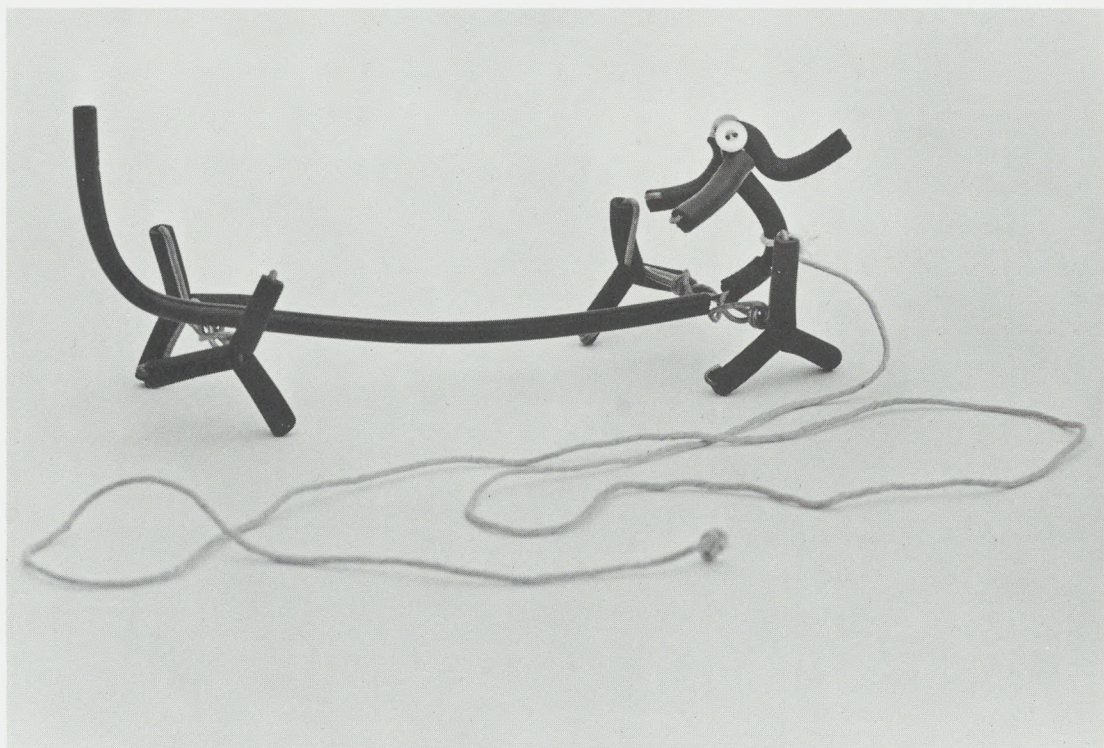
1. Fernand Leger, quoted in Werner Schmalenbach, *Leger* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers.), p. 154.
2. Chaim Gross, Letter to author (December 1, 1980).
3. Alexander Calder, quoted in Jean Lipman, Editor, *Calder's Circus* (New York: E.P. Dutton in association with Whitney Museum of American Art), p. 42.
4. Margaret Calder Hayes, Letter to author (August 13, 1980).
5. Gilbert Seldes, *The 7 Lively Arts* (New York: Sagamore Press, 1957), p. 260.
6. Jean Lipman, *Calder's Universe* (New York: Viking Press in cooperation with Whitney Museum of American Art, 1976), p. 63.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
8. Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946), p. 22.
9. Anne Ryan, quoted in catalogue, *Anne Ryan: Collages* (New York: Marlborough Gallery, Inc., November 16-December 4, 1974), p. 7.
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11. Henry Miller, *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pierce, 1948), p. 110.
12. Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921), pp. 168-169.
13. Fernand Leger, *Functions of Painting*, translated by Alexandra Anderson, from *Documents of 20th-Century Art*, Robert Motherwell, editor (New York: Viking Press, 1965), p. 133.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
16. Schmalenbach, p. 141.
17. William Baziotis, "I Cannot Evolve Any Concrete Theory," *Possibilities I*, no. 1 (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., Winter, 1947-48), p. 2.



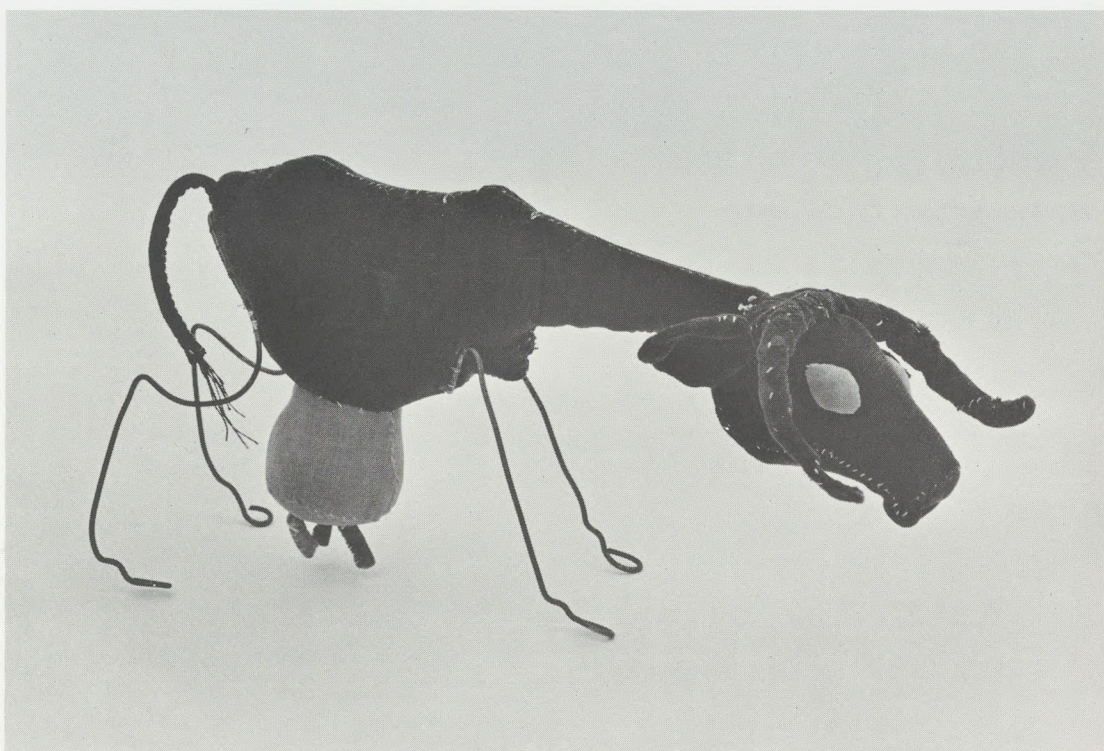
59. Fernand Leger *The Two Acrobats* 1942-43



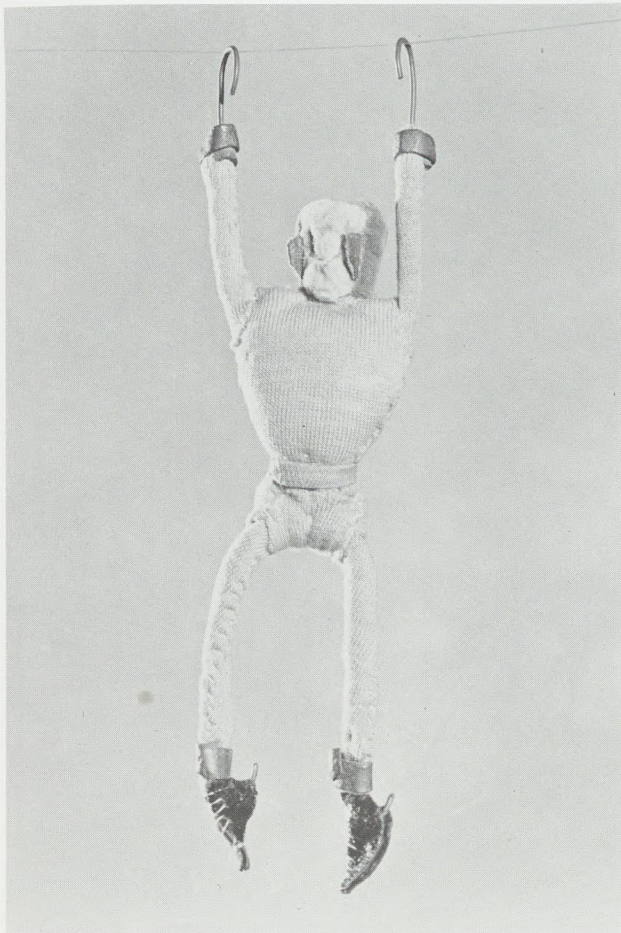
25. Alexander Calder *The Circus* 1932



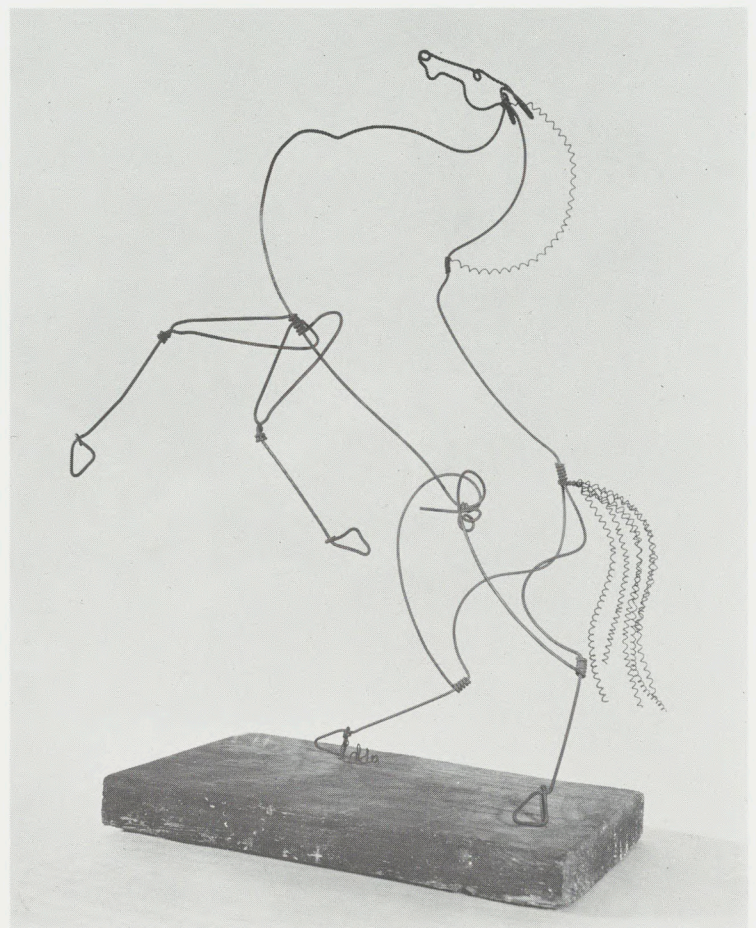
23. Alexander Calder *Dog for the Fratellini Brothers* 1927



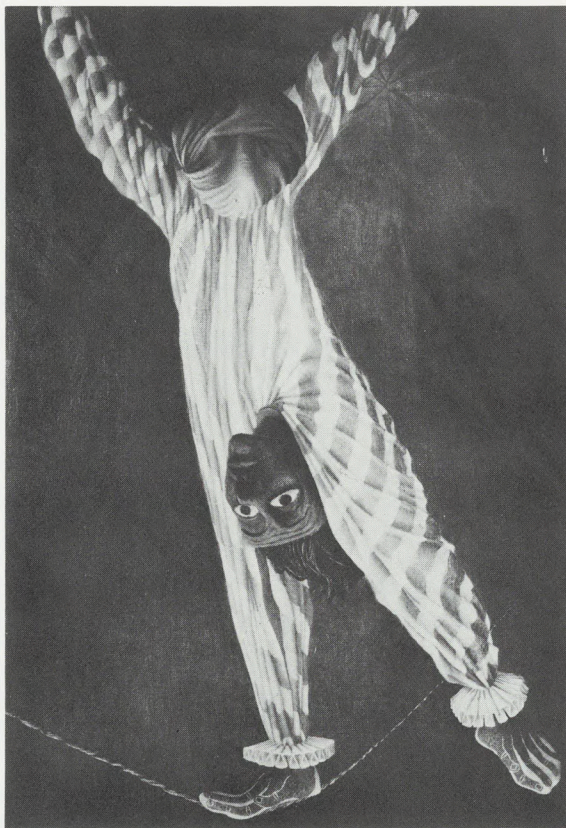
24. Alexander Calder *Blue Cow* 1926



22. Alexander Calder *Acrobat* 1926



26. Alexander Calder *Rearing Stallion* circa 1928



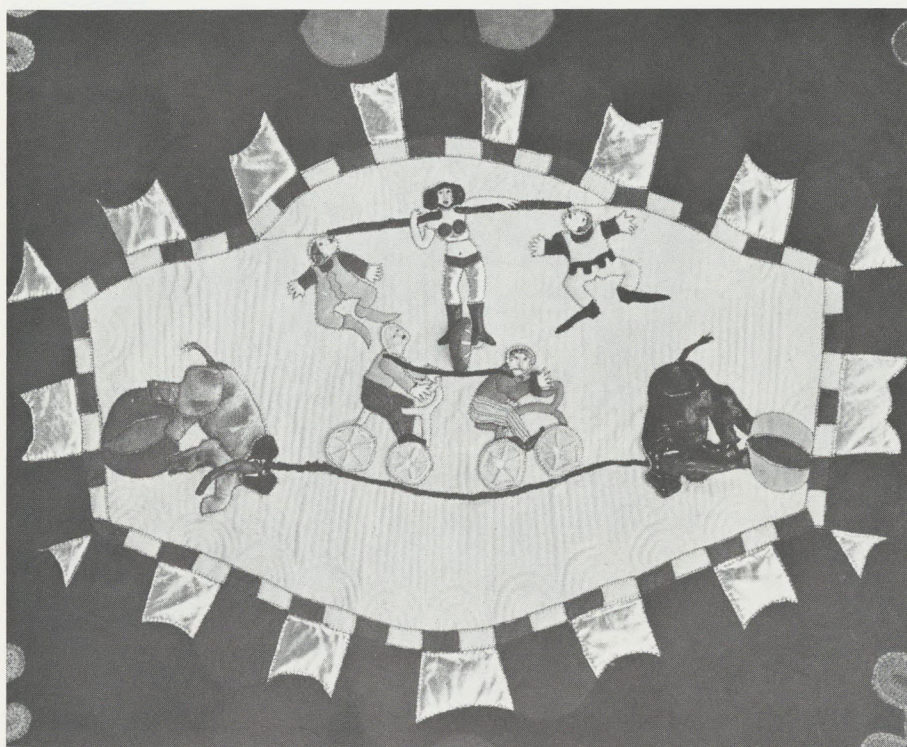
82. Alton Pickens *Acrobat* 1947



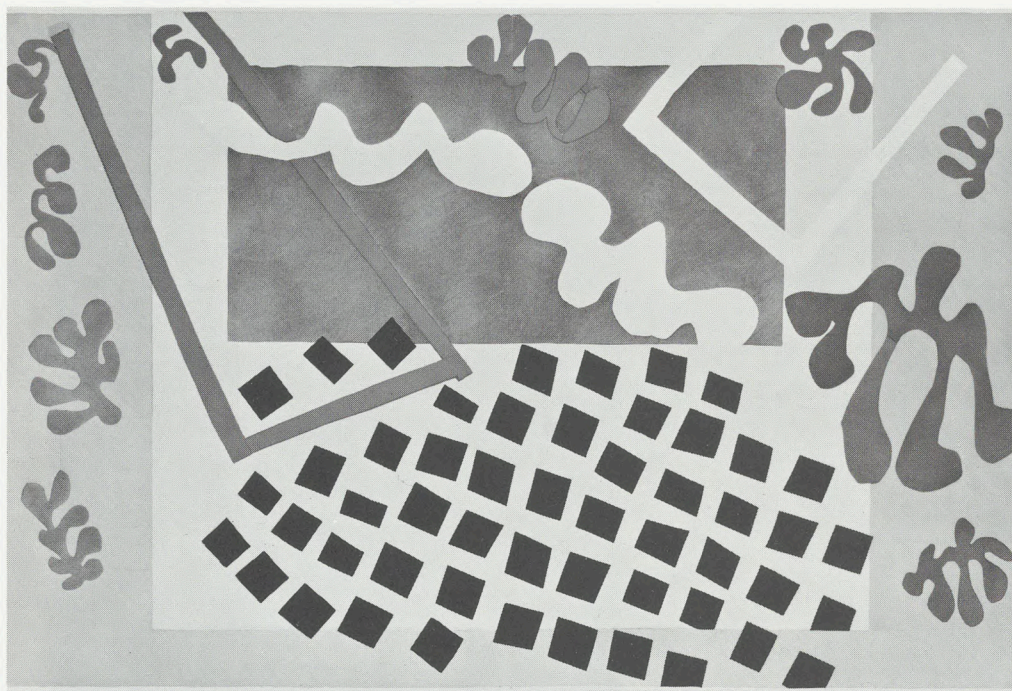
7. Milton Avery *Chariot Race* 1933



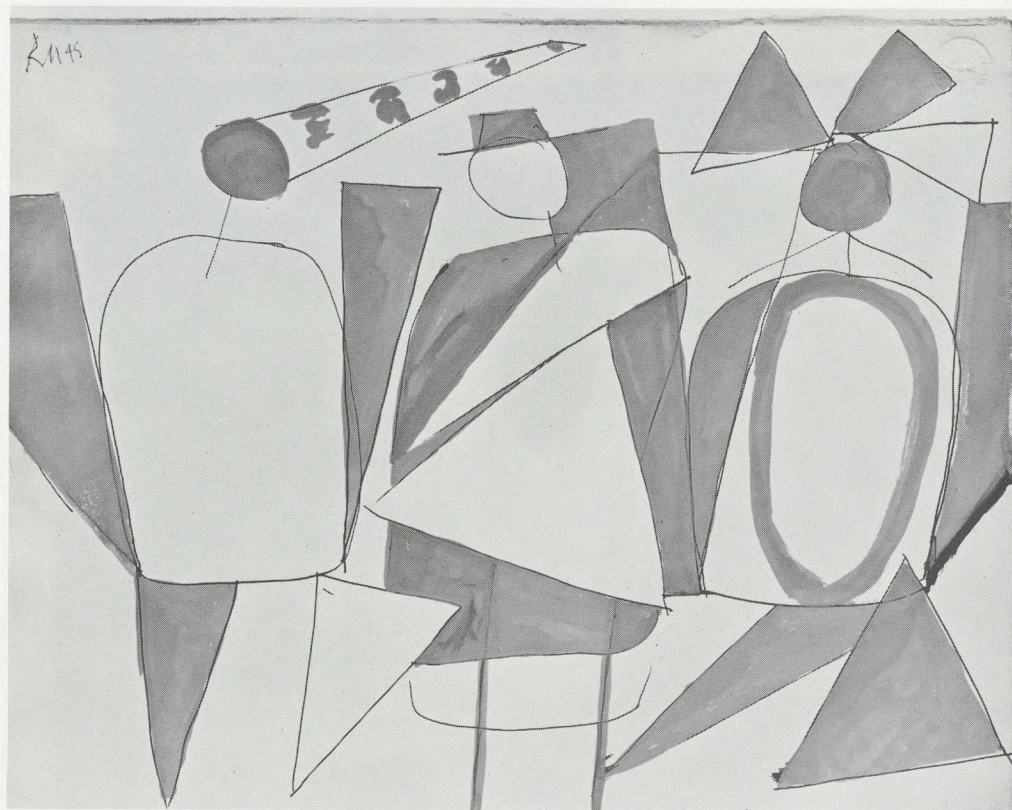
103. H.C. Westermann *Freaks* 1978



51. Anne Kingsbury *Circus Blanket* 1976



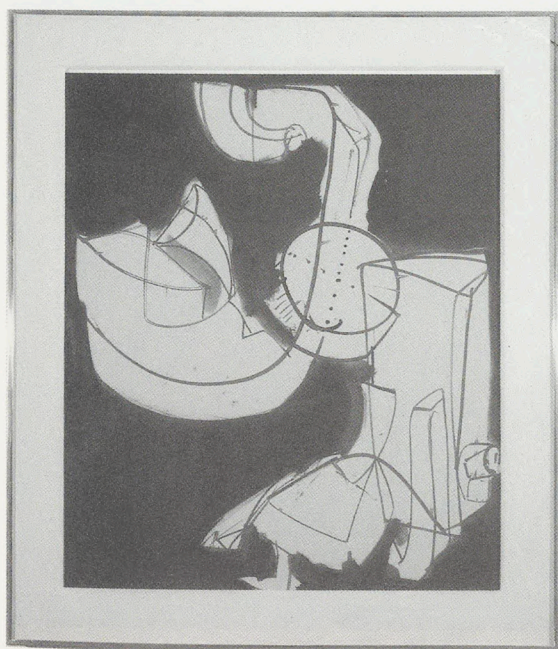
67. Henri Matisse *The Codomas* 1944



71. Robert Motherwell *The Three Clowns* 1945



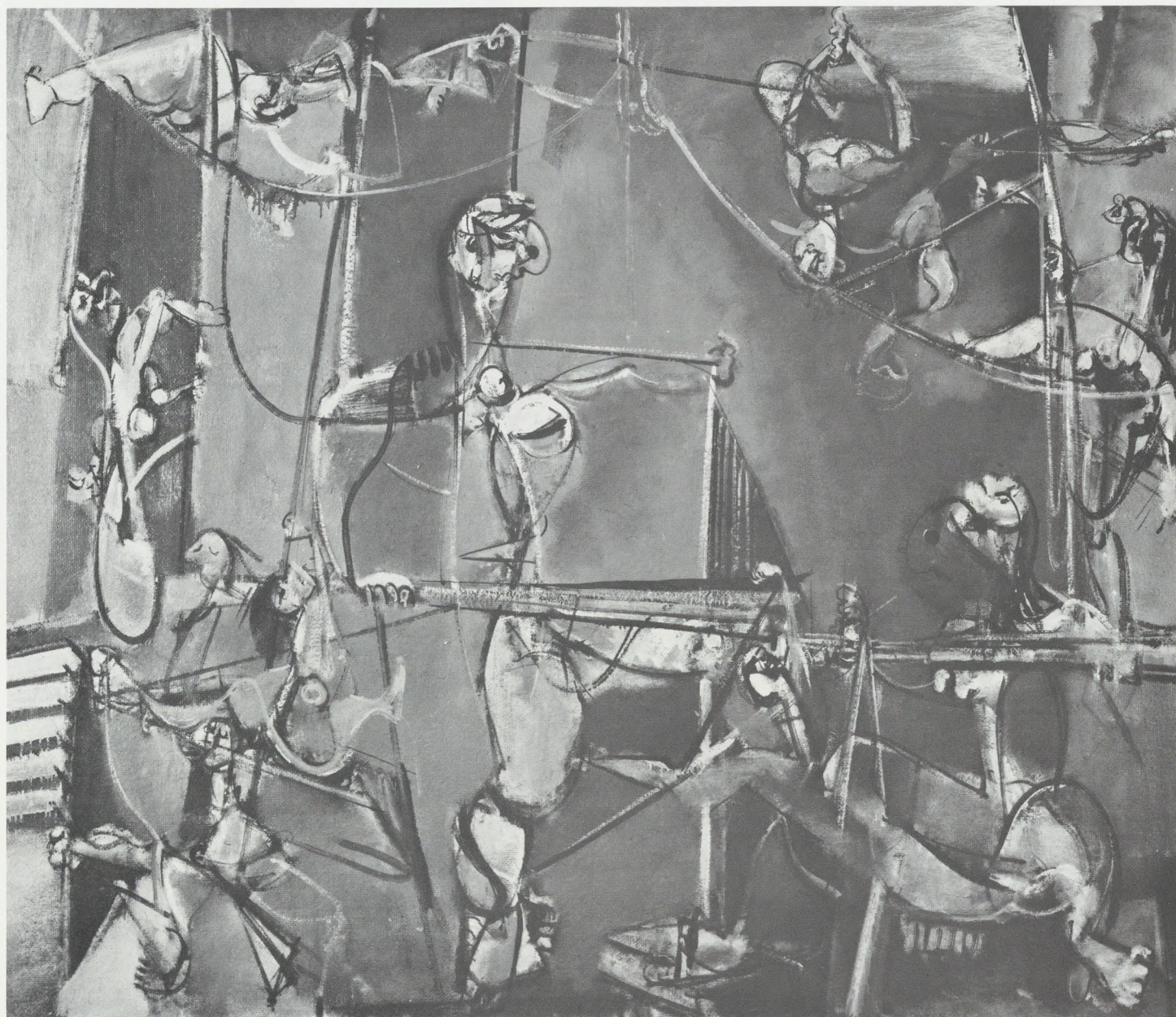
75. Kenneth Noland *Clown* 1969



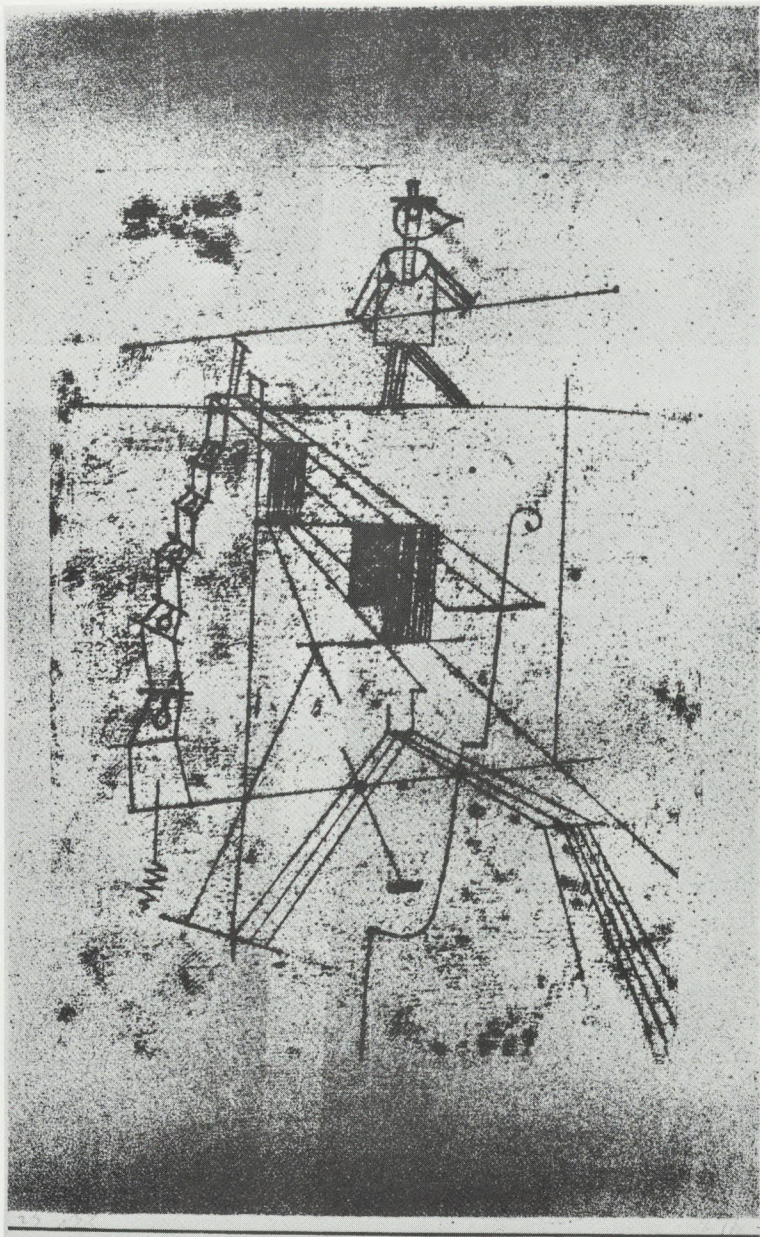
46. Hans Hofmann *Pierrot* 1954



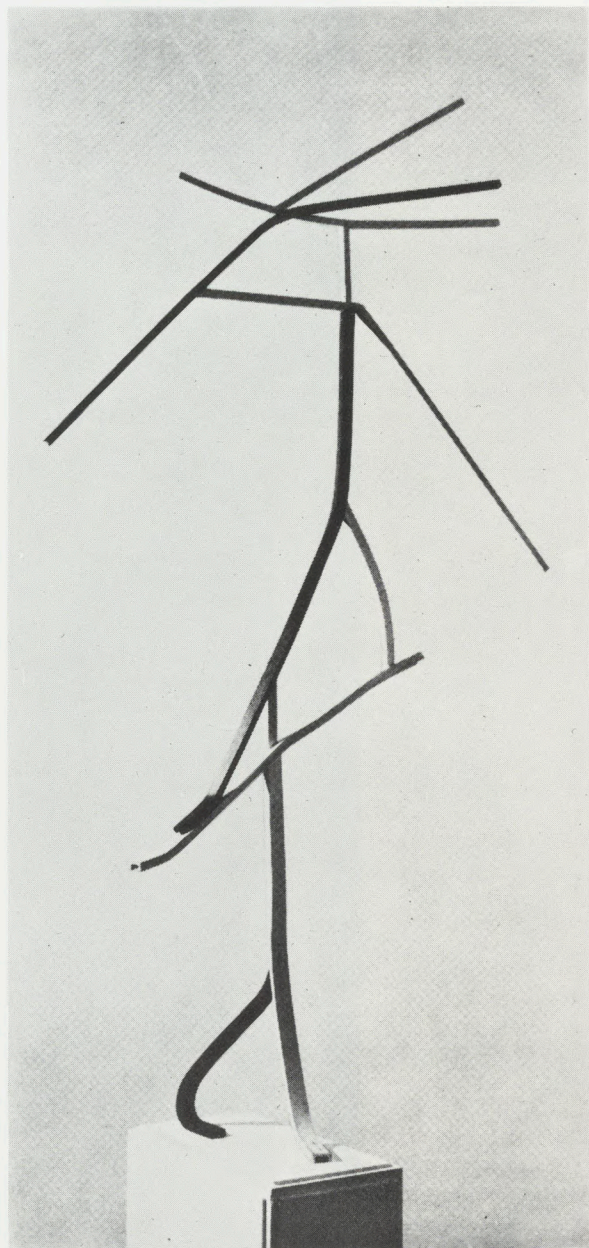
43. Chaim Gross *Unicyclist* 1978



102. Max Weber *Acrobats* 1946



52. Paul Klee *Tightrope Walker* 1921

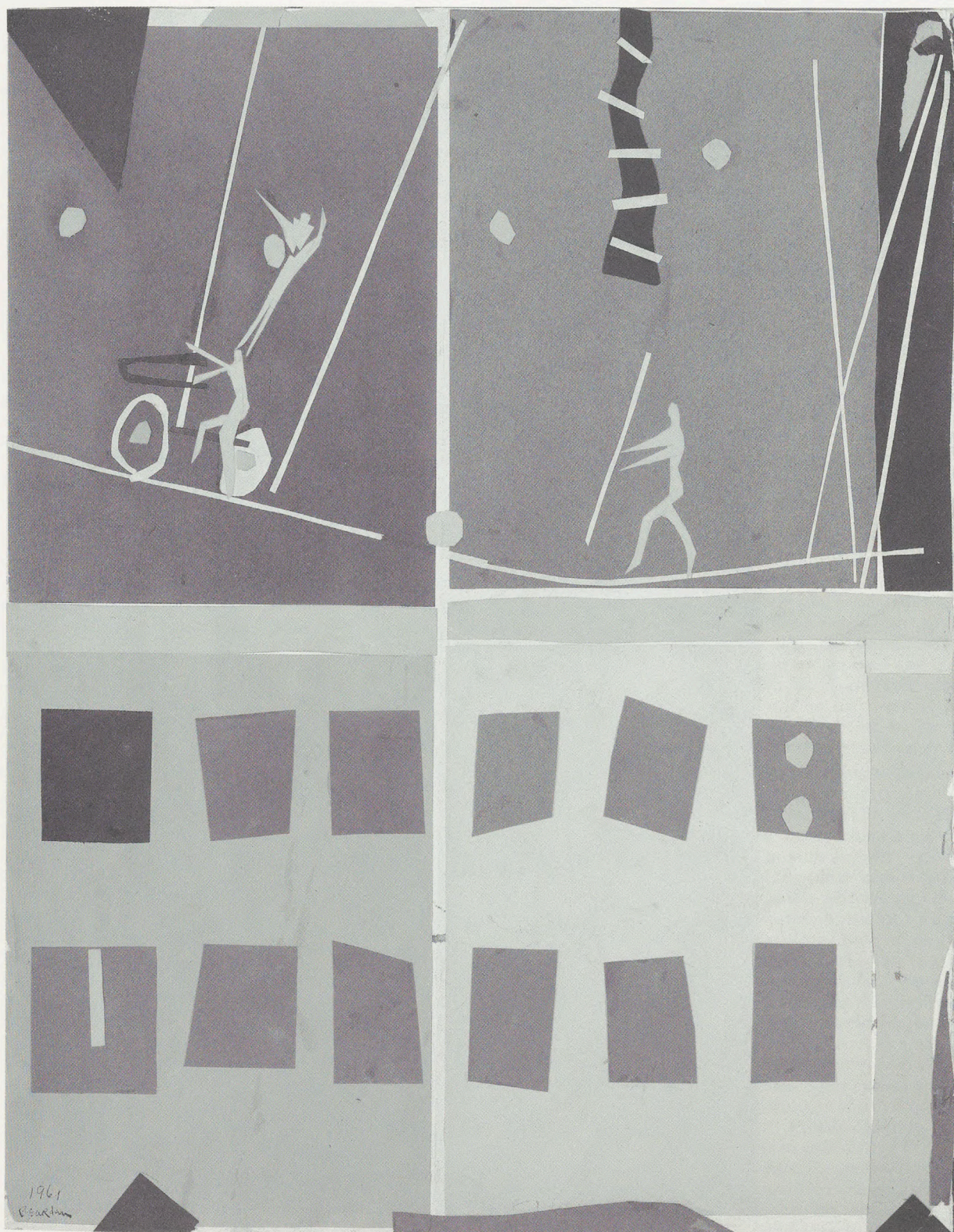


27. Mary Callery *Equilibrist* 1949



8. William Bazotes *Circus Abstraction* 1946

THE ARTIST AS PERFORMER



12. Romare Bearden *The Circus* 1961



13. Max Beckmann *Acrobat on Trapeze* 1940

THE ARTIST AS PERFORMER

If there is a single work in Center Ring: The Artist that could sum up why so many artists and poets have felt a kinship with the circus performer, it may be Jules Pascin's satiric *Le Cirque Pascin* (No. 77). Whether true or not, many artists believe that society looks upon them as jokers and tricksters, members of a vocation who are put in the world only to provide the masses with laughs and cheap thrills. Pascin deals with this common vexation of the artist in just about the most literal terms imaginable. It is the artist himself we see sitting before the easel in the ring of *Le Cirque Pascin*. He is painting with a brush grasped in the toes of a bare foot. It is an amazing feat, to be sure, but Pascin's audience is unimpressed. Virtually everyone in the tiered seats is wearing an expression of boredom and a few spectators have nodded off. It is as though the crowd has seen enough of Pascin's act and is anxious for him to move on to some more sensational stunt.

Pascin was not the first artist to feel that painters and poets are vastly undervalued by society, but it may be that only the critics Edmond and Jules Goncourt were more vituperative than Pascin in excoriating the public. In their writings, the Goncourts expressed great empathy for the circus performers because, like artists, poets and great minds, the clowns, jugglers and acrobats were so little appreciated. In an entry the brothers made on November 21, 1859, in their *Journals*, they told of having gone to a circus and being astounded by the feats of the "leapers," early daredevils who could vault 30 or 40 feet into space from hickory springboards and do mid-air somersaults before alighting on straw-filled tickings (No. 132). The Goncourts wrote:

"... We see them, these men and women, risking their bones in the air to receive a few bravos... Historians, philosophers... and poets, we, too, jump around for the stupid public."¹

It is possible that Honore Daumier started the theme of using the circus performer to symbolize the artist. It has often been pointed out that he may have seen parallels between his own life and that of the clown when he went to work as a cartoonist for the daily newspaper *Le Charivari* in the 1830's and was expected to keep all Paris laughing with his satiric sketches. Most of Daumier's circus gypsies seems as tragic as the anti-hero in "The Old Mountebank," a prose poem by Daumier's great friend, the critic and poet

Charles Baudelaire. In the elegaic poem, Baudelaire tells of having visited one of the ragtag Paris circuses and seeing "a ruin of a man" wrapped in rags and exhibiting himself in a sideshow booth. Baudelaire compared the grizzled old performer to an artist who has been forsaken by his audience.

"I have just seen the picture of an old man of letters who has outlived the generation which he amused with brilliance; of an old poet without friends, without family, without children; degraded by his misery and by ingratitude of the public; and into whose booth the forgetful world will not enter."²

Of the incalculable number of artworks that have been inspired by circus performers in the last two centuries, Daumier's *The Mountebanks Changing Place* (No. 34) presents us with one of the most unforgettable images. It depicts a circus family—a man, woman and their son of 10 or 12—plodding through the streets of Paris and through life. They are burdened, but more with the weight of despair than with possessions, for although they carry all they own in the world, their material loads are light. The man, still clad in his clown costume, carries a wooden chair which may be a prop for an acrobatic act. The boy, shirtless and wearing trunks, carries a cash box which is probably empty. He is thin, but sinewy with muscle, and old beyond his years, the result of his hard life as a nomadic entertainer. Theodore Reff has suggested with plausibility that *The Mountebanks Changing Place* might have reflected Daumier's own "unsettled conditions" in the 1860's after Daumier lost his job with *Le Charivari* and was without the security of regular income.³

Early and late in his long career, Picasso used *saltimbanques* in his art to symbolize himself and other artists and poets. The American writer Gertrude Stein, one of Picasso's first patrons, and Fernande Olivier, his mistress from 1903 to 1912, have given accounts of the great relish Picasso had for going to the Cirque Medrano after he came from Spain to Paris soon after the turn of the century. Stein said it was at least weekly that she joined Picasso and Olivier at the circus where the three "felt flattered because they could be intimate with the clowns, the jugglers, the horses and their riders."⁴ And Olivier told us that she and Picasso could be found at the Cirque Medrano "three or four times a week at least."⁵ She said that it was mostly the famous clowns

like Grock and Antönet who drew him to the circus and that the artist spent endless hours talking with them in a bar at the Cirque Medrano, often with Georges Braque in his company.⁶

As much as Picasso enjoyed watching the clowns in the gas-lighted ring of the fashionable Cirque Medrano, it is not the players of the circus amphitheatres that his art portrays, but rather those more lowly performers, the *saltimbanques*. The *saltimbanques* never had contracts to play in the permanent circus houses, but performed in fields, streets and anywhere they could attract a crowd and lived by the offerings they could collect.

Hugues Le Roux wrote that the *saltimbanques* were a superior people with "a taste for adventure, wonderful facility in acquiring languages, in assimilating every variety of civilization and a strange amalgamation of qualities which would seem incompatible with each other—Italian pliancy, Anglo-Saxon coolness, German tenacity."⁷ Like so many painters and poets, these gypsy entertainers made great sacrifices for the freedom to practice their art. They were homeless, lived in destitution and were without possessions, except for those they could carry on their backs. And because of their rootlessness and their eccentric vocations as clowns, rope dancers and tumblers, they were regarded by society in general as being lazy, aimless and virtually valueless as human beings.

For Picasso, the *saltimbanques* rather than the contract players of the Cirque Medrano or Cirque D'Hiver symbolized the artist in his alienation from society. There are known to exist at least a few Picasso drawings of *saltimbanques* actually performing. Mostly, though, his *saltimbanques* are revealed to us in dismal boarding house rooms or resting from their eternal wandering in desolate no-man's-lands far removed from the rest of society. The players do not have the happy expressions they affect for the public when they appear in their fair booths or in their circles in grown-over fields. They appear wan, starved, tired, forlorn, drained of spirit.

Picasso did some circus paintings in his so-called Rose Period (1904-1907) in which the central figure can clearly be identified as the artist himself. The circus figures that appear in other Picasso pictures from the same time are more generalized in their appearances, but they, too, apparently were intended to symbolize the artist. This is true of the

clown figures that appear in the two Picasso 1905 drypoint etchings included in the exhibition, *La Toilette de la Mere* (No. 80) and *Circus Family* (No. 79). Picasso and Olivier did not have a child of their own at the time *La Toilette de la Mere* was executed and since the clown depicted in the etchings is holding an infant, some might discount the idea that Picasso and Olivier are the adult figures in the tender scene. Theodore Reff has observed that the contention that Picasso and Olivier are in the picture is "strengthened, not weakened, by the presence... of a small child."⁸ He points out that Picasso's friends, the poets Max Jacob and Andre Salmon, make references in their memoirs to Olivier having temporarily adopted a child at this time.⁹

Picasso scholars have asserted that the artist masquerades in *Circus Family* in the persona of the clown watching the boy balancing on a large ball. The subject of *Circus Family* exists in at least two other media. The Baltimore Museum of Art has a watercolor whose image is nearly identical to that in the drypoint. And in an astounding discovery made as recently as 1980 when the National Gallery of Art's famous *Family of Saltimbanques* was X-rayed, a painted version of *Circus Family* was found beneath its surface.

Jester (No. 81), the 1905 Picasso bronze in the exhibition, exists as unimpeachable testimony that by his 26th year, the artist was already the possessor of astounding gifts as a sculptor, as well as those of a painter and printmaker. Because of the way light falling on the character head is diffused by its greatly modelled surface, *Jester* almost appears to have the halation of a saint. The artist's friend Roland Penrose, in his book, *Picasso: His Life and Work*, said it was Max Jacob who sat for *Jester*. Penrose recalled the circumstances of how the work came into being:

"It was begun late one evening after returning home from the circus with Max Jacob. The clay rapidly took on the appearance of his friend, but the next day he continued to work on it and only the lower part of the face retained the likeness. The jester's hat was added as the head changed its personality."¹⁰

The profound sense of isolation from ordinary society that Pascin, Daumier and Picasso experienced is well documented and is evident in works by them that are in the exhibition. But we know, too, that the struggle has been difficult for many artists

who were to follow them as blazers of new paths in modern art. Through an article by April J. Paul that was published in 1979 in the "Archives of American Art Journal," we know, for example, of the great difficulties of Byron Browne, a brilliant abstractionist of the 1930's and 1940's whose work is still too little known. Paul includes in her article a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* which was published on August 11, 1940. There is nothing restrained about Browne's criticism of the public:

"... The great American public has what might be termed 'a baseball mind.' The mysteries of painting and art in general are not for them. It is the old story. 'I'm from Missouri and gotta be shown.' Hence cocktail shakers and crooners. What does all this leave to the creative painter? It leaves him to a great extent a solitary figure following a most difficult path, one demanding the utmost in spiritual and physical courage. I, for one, have steeled myself to this indifference... I do not expect people to buy or even like my pictures."

Once the circus players became established in the art of Daumier, Picasso and others as symbols of the artist in his estrangement from the ordinary world, later painters and sculptors began casting them in their works to express other ideas. Max Beckmann, for example, often assumed the identity of a circus performer in his canvases to give expression to his psychological states. Sometimes he masqueraded in his paintings as a clown, sometimes as a compere, or circus announcer, and often, when he was troubled, as a daredevil. The German art historian Erhard Gopel told of accompanying Beckmann to a circus and seeing a strange and radical change come over his friend, as though Beckmann had quite literally been put in a spell by the spectacle: "Because it was light, I was able to carefully observe Beckmann and I could see the mystique of the circus transforming him. He pushed his hat back to his neck and rested his chin on the crook of his bamboo cane... He focused fully on the performance. His neighbors ceased to exist. Beckmann absorbed all of the elements of the circus..."¹¹

Beckmann's powerful *Acrobat on Trapeze* (No. 13) is a statement about the churning apprehension he was experiencing concerning what lay ahead for himself and for the world in 1940 with the outbreak of World War II. At the time, the

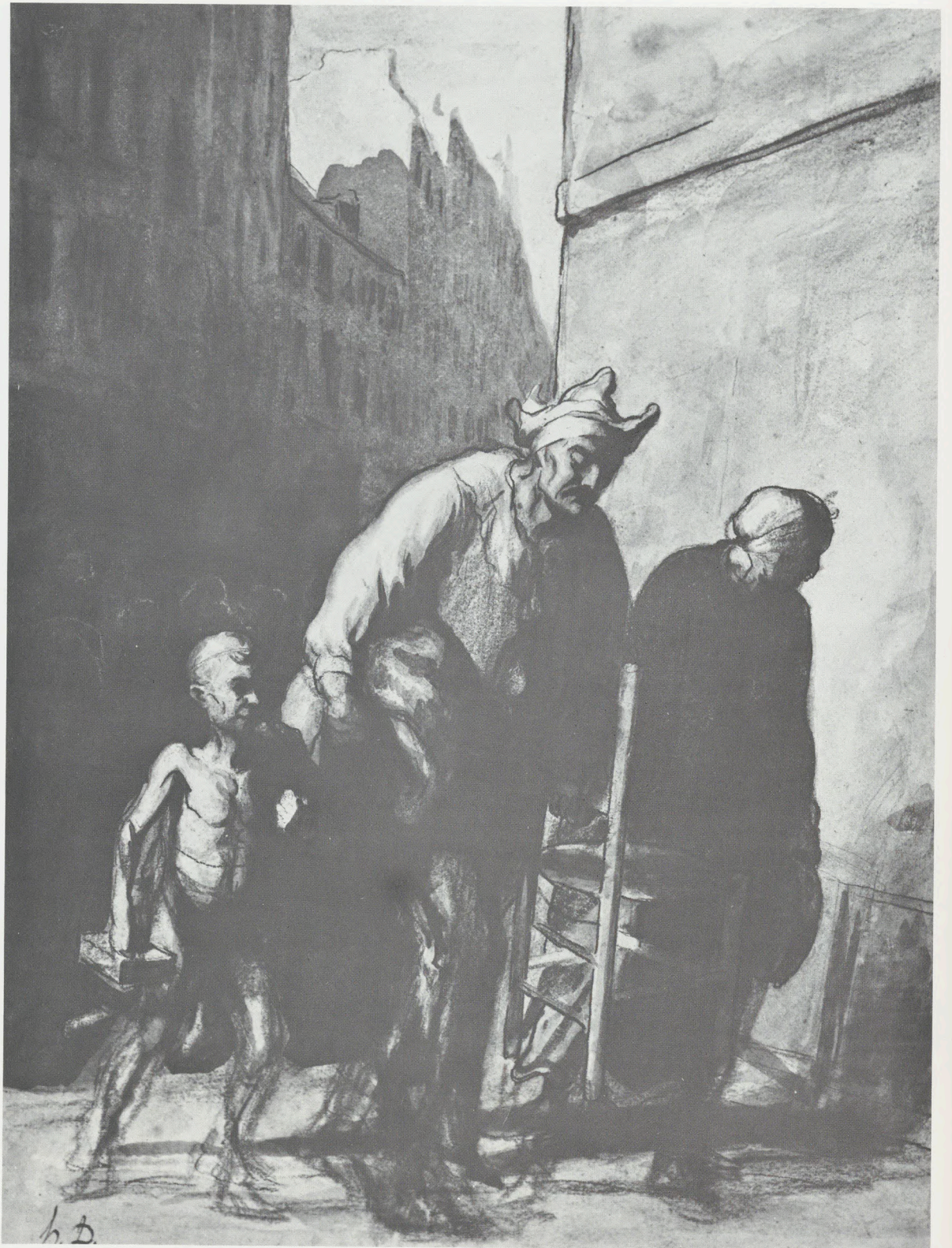
German artist was in exile in Amsterdam, unable because of the war to come to America to accept an offered teaching job at The Art Institute of Chicago. Peter Selz has pointed out that *Acrobat on Trapeze* coincides in time with some revealing lines that Beckmann penned in a new diary:¹² "I begin this new notebook in a condition of complete uncertainty about my own existence and the state of our planet. Wherever one looks: chaos and disorder."¹³ In *Acrobat on Trapeze*, it is unmistakably Beckmann whom we see in the stratosphere of the Big Top. From our accustomed seats at the circus, the trapeze flyers appear to us to be daring young men, demigods who know no fear. In Beckmann's startling closeup, we are brought face to face with the daredevil. He is not unafraid as we had thought. Alone and isolated in space, he has the troubled expression of a man who knows that the consequences could be disastrous the next time he leaves his trapeze bar and flies out into the void, a metaphor for the great unknown.

While the identity of the fool in Abraham Rattner's painting of *The Clown* (No. 83) cannot be determined with certainty, there is little doubt that the figure is the artist himself or some surrogate he is using to make a confession. Throughout his career, in paintings using themes of war and the Crucifixion, Rattner was preoccupied with dramatizing man's inhumanity to his brothers. As a young man, Rattner may have believed the dictum of his friend Picasso that art can be "an instrument for war and attack." But by his sixty-ninth year when *The Clown* was painted, Rattner had apparently come to the realization that no artwork ever changed the world one iota, not even *Guernica*, Picasso's famous painting in which he angrily denounced slaughter and atrocities of war overrunning his homeland in Spain. There will always be hate and brutality in the world, Rattner seems to have concluded, depicting himself before a painting of clowns with tormented expressions and crying mouths, his own self merging into the canvas to become one of the anguished fools.

Robert Arneson has made extremely personal statements by creating a great gallery of self-portraits in the form of ceramic sculptures and drawings, many of them, like the collage *Clown* (No. 4), conceptions of himself as a Hermes-like bust. In *Clown* he depicts himself with a huge, gag-store ear on one side of his head and



77. Jules Pascin *Center Ring* 1910



34. Honore Daumier *The Montebanks Changing Place* circa 1865

his own ear exposed on the other. He wears some of the clown's greasepaint, but is still recognizably Robert Arneson. He may be saying about himself what all men might say: I am to some extent what I make myself out to be, but I am also what I am.

There are other works in the exhibition in which the artist has projected himself, but not necessarily in the sense where the artist or his alter-ego can be identified. In such works, the artists may have projected only their spirits into the scene, rather than their physical beings. This enables them to express their feelings without being recognized by viewers as being part of the subject matter. Byron Burford's *Bally with Ruth* (No. 20) may be a good example of such a work. Burford has been starstruck since his boyhood. When the circuses came to his hometown of Jackson, Mississippi, he watched them unload their trains and set up their great tents. After the circuses left town, he scoured the lot where the Big Tops had been pitched to see if he might find some *Billboard* magazines or trinkets that the gypsies left behind. When the celebrated fat lady Baby Ruth Pontico came to Jackson with the Dodson World's Fair Shows, Burford found temporary employment running errands for her. Late in the 1930's, he spent a few days traveling with the Tom Mix Circus. Later still, he worked as a musician for the Polack Bros. Circus and even took out his own spook show, Dr. Caligari's Cabinet of Horrors. Burford, now in his sixties and a professor at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, still hires out in the summer with one or another traveling circus, usually the Franzen Bros. Circus.

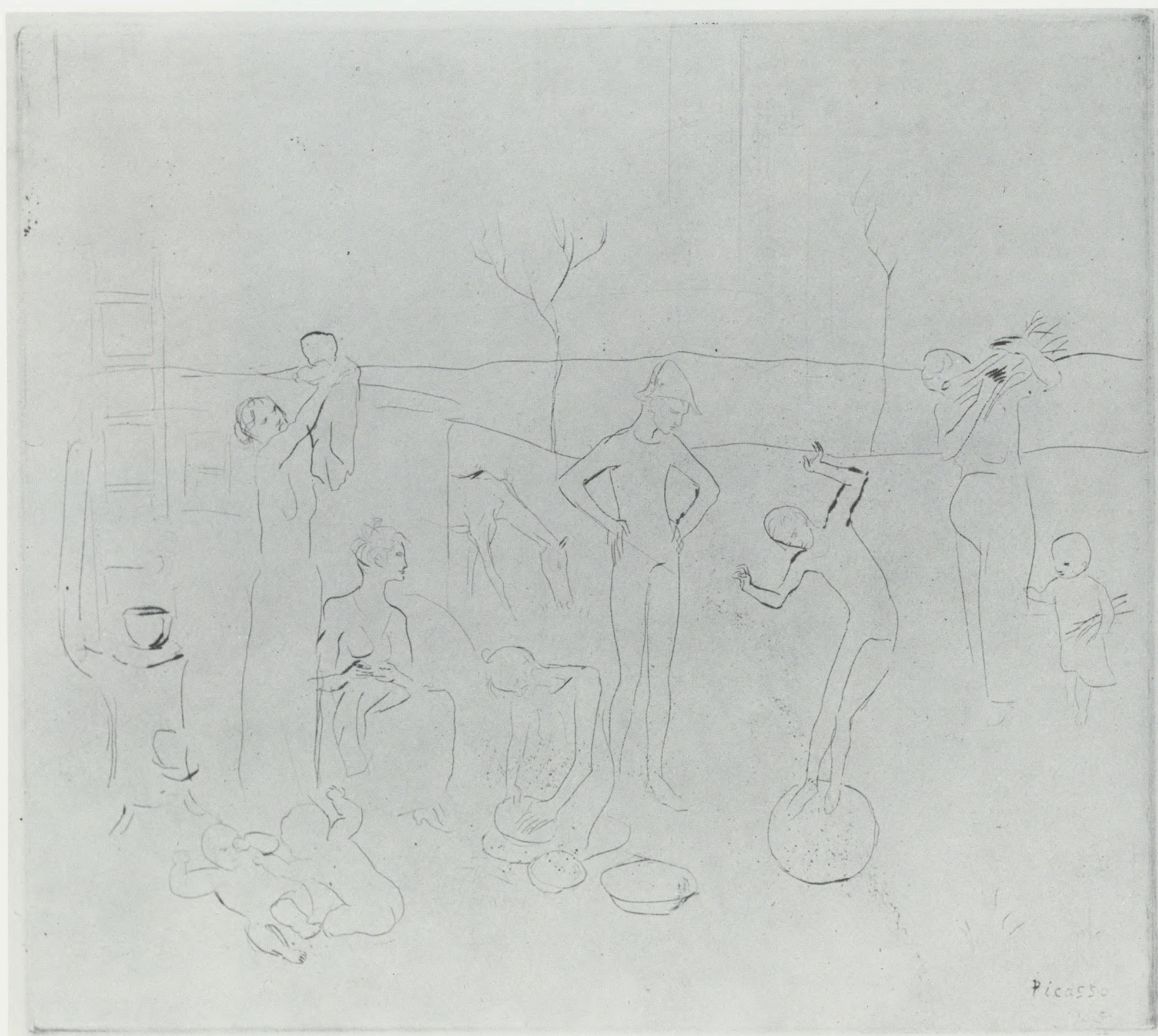
Burford knows Baby Ruth and the other freaks of his *Bally with Ruth* well. As a musician and as a "talker," or sideshow announcer, he has been on the bally platform himself. In his appearances on the sideshow stage, Burford has lost his identification as an artist and has become, as it were, the art, something for spectators to gawk at, to wonder about. Concerning his own feelings about appearing on stage Burford says, "I have stood on a bally platform, in front of a sideshow banner I painted, and have tried to project myself into the audience, looking back at the scene."¹⁴ Burford might be doing something like that in *Bally with Ruth* through a kind of transmigration of his spirit which enables him to be on stage at the same time he is in the audience. Such a complex artistic exercise allows Burford

to raise some rather fundamental questions about the human condition: how are we different from each other? How are we all the same?

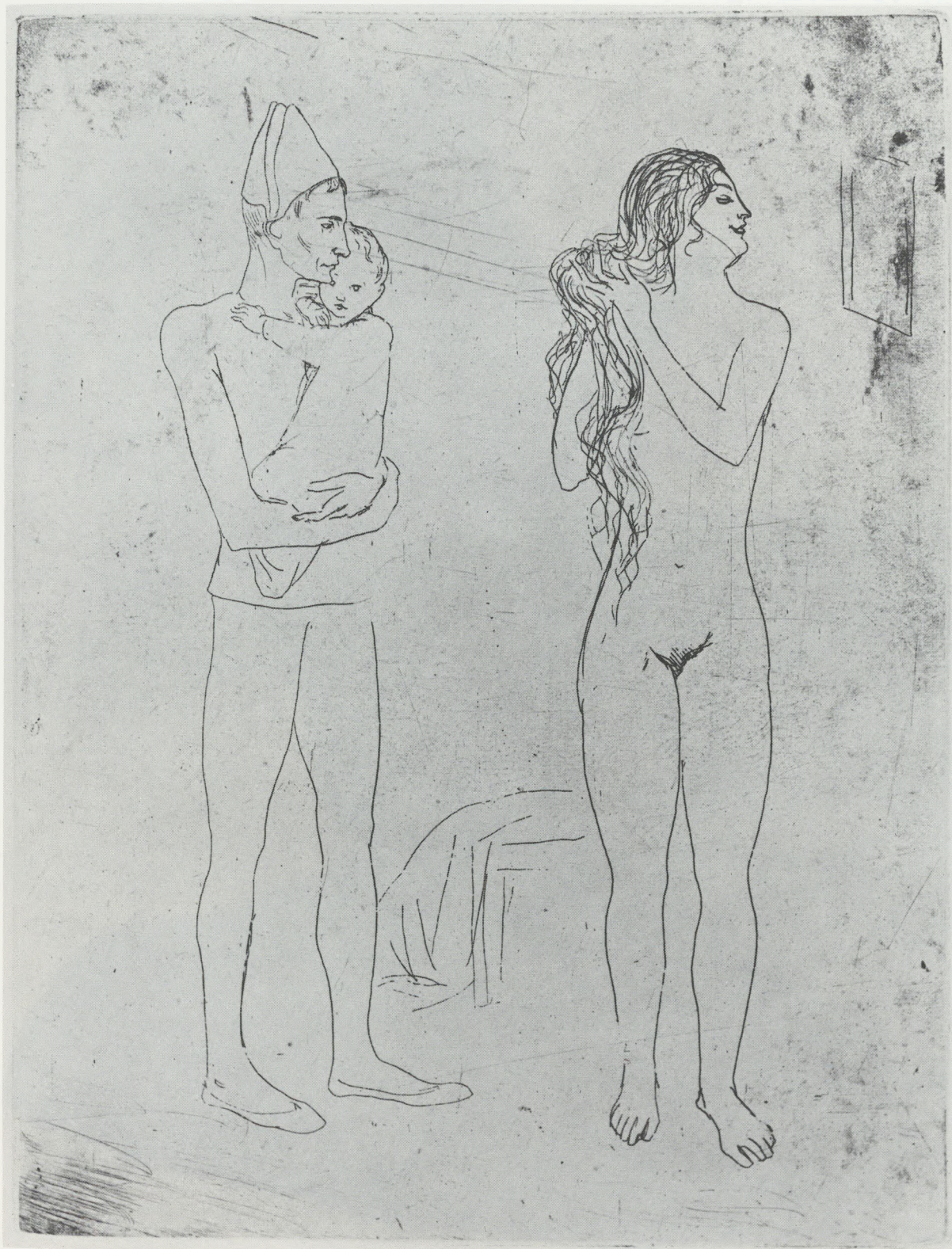
1. Edmond and Jules Goncourt, *Journal: Memoires de la vie litteraire, 1858-1860*, Vol. 3 (Monaco, 1956), p. 171.
2. Charles Baudelaire, *Le Vieux Saltimbanque*, in *Oeuvres completes*, ed. by Marcel A. Ruff (Paris, France: Editions du Seuil, 1968), pp. 156-157.
3. Thomas Reff, "Harlequins, Saltimbanques, Clowns, and Fools," *Artforum* (September, 1971), p. 37.
4. Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 7.
5. Fernande Olivier, *Picasso and His Friends*, translated by Jane Miller (New York: Appleton Century, 1963), p. 127.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Hughes Le Roux, *Acrobats and Montebanks* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1890), pp. 2-3.
8. Reff, p. 37.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Sir Roland Penrose, *Picasso: His Life and Work* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), pp. 113-114.
11. Erhard Gopel, "Zirkus motive und ihre verwandlung im werke Max Beckmann," translated by Susanne-Christine Voeltz, *Die Kunst und das schone Heim*, No. 9 (1958), pp. 328-331.
12. Peter Selz, *Max Beckmann* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964), p. 95.
13. Max Beckmann, Entry in diary (May 4, 1940).
14. Byron Burford, Letter to author (August 16, 1980).



132. Forepaugh & Sells Bros. *Flights over Elephants* 1899



79. Pablo Picasso *Circus Family* 1905



80. Pablo Picasso *La Toilette de la Mere* 1905



81. Pablo Picasso *The Jester* 1905



4. Robert Arneson *Clown* 1978



83. Abraham Rattner *The Clown* 1964



20. Byron Burford *Bally with Ruth* 1980



66. Reginald Marsh *Pip and Flip* 1932

THE ARTIST AS SPECTATOR

The artist is more privileged than most spectators at the circus. He is able to see even more than is advertised on such posters as one from the 1898 Barnum & Bailey Circus which promised such wonders as "living and breathing headless bodies . . . revolving sprites, beautiful mermaids, gruesome gnomes & curious flying people." He sees essences in the circus that may be invisible even to those with 20-20 vision. The artist is not an artist only because of what he can do with paint, or stone or clay. In the final analysis, he is an artist because of the way he sees the world and presents it to us.

As was discussed earlier, the French Impressionists and other innovative painters of 19th-century France were regular spectators at the circus. At the same time, the more conventional painters of their day often looked to classical, historical and religious subjects as sources for their art, and made elaborate tableaux in their studios as models for their painted fictions. But painters in the exhibition such as Jean-Louis Forain and Suzanne Valadon, as well as Georges Seurat and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, preferred to look to real life as the model for their experiments. The seats at the circus provided them with a good vantage point from which to observe events of the passing scene.

Forain was celebrated in his day as an illustrator because his drawings were widely reproduced in *Le Figaro* and other popular periodicals. But it is evident from Forain's painting *The Tight Rope Walker* (No. 37) that if he was not a notably original artist, he had great finesse as a painter and a flair for the dramatic. The viewer sees the rope-walker somewhat obliquely, as though he or she were part of the crowd in the foreground and had momentarily glanced backward to glimpse the performer in the red-orange tutu. Forain has heightened the theatrical air of the painting by suffusing the faces with colored light from the gas lanterns. Probably the rope-walker and the clowns on the distant stage are putting on free shows to attract a crowd, and the splendidly attired Parisians are rushing to a tent or amphitheatre to get the best seats in the house. In its composition and its theatrical light, *The Tight Rope Walker*, like many paintings by Forain, owes much to Degas, who once said of Forain that he "paints with his hand in my pocket."¹

Degas had a reputation for being miserly in his praise of other artists. He was also thought to be a misogynist, so it was a high compliment indeed when, after seeing some drawings by Suzanne Valadon, he remarked, "You are one of us."² But it is evident from Valadon's *The Circus* (No. 100) that her art is less dependent on that of Degas than is Forain's. While Valadon's draftsmanship appears crude alongside that of Forain, and her colors tend toward the vulgar, her style is well suited to suggesting the transient spectacle of the circus. Having been a performer herself until she had a serious fall from the trapeze, she knew the circus world from the inside. However, it is from the spectator's point of view that she transcribed the scene of *The Circus*. With clowns cavorting in every corner of the tanbark, an equestrienne and her mount rounding the ring and a bandmaster leading the orchestra over the curtained entranceway, one hardly knows where to focus his attention, which has always been a problem for the circusgoer and one compounded for him when P.T. Barnum added two more rings of activity.

The visual qualities of the circus that the 19th-century French painters found so alluring were still dazzling artists well into this century, as is evident from many works in the show. Gifford Beal, an American romanticist, kept returning to the Big Top for ideas throughout his career as an artist, which began in his early twenties after years of study with William Merritt Chase. Beal painted in several different manners. Three of them are apparent in the rather lightly sketched gouache, *Circus Day* (No. 9); the highly finished oil, *Circus Performer* (No. 11); and the canvas, *Elephant Parade* which in style strikes a middle ground between soft and hard focus realism. Whatever the style he used in his treatment of the circus, all of his pictures have the "feel" of the spectacle and its lovely passages of color, its shifting forms and the sense of space of the Big Top. Beal had friends among the performers and officials of the circus. As a result, he had entree to the staging areas and to unusual vantage points which allowed him to examine the activities at the close range that is evident in *Elephant Parade* and *Circus Performer*.

Robert Weaver is another American who often turned to the circus for subject matter. This can at least be partially explained by the fact that he grew up in Peru, Indiana, which was the winter

home for such great shows as the Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sells-Floto, and John Robinson circuses. His love for painting circus scenes must have been reinforced in 1937 when, as a 24 year old student at the John Herron Art Institute at Indianapolis, his oil *Circus Performers* won a \$6,000 Chaloner Foundation prize for three years of study abroad. Beal, along with Maharoni Young, served on the jury that awarded the prize. *Butterfly Ladies* (No. 101), Weaver's huge pastel drawing, was suggested by an actual group of stuntwomen (No. 137), but the work's dramatic composition might also have been influenced by Degas' famous painting, *Miss Lala at the Cirque Fernando* (1879) depicting a performer hanging by her teeth high above an unseen audience, in the cupola of the famous circus amphitheatre.

Allison Cann-Clift is the only spectator at the circus of her cloth painting *Spotlights* (No. 28) and she is there not as a paying ticket-holder, but as one who observes the goings on from a place of concealment, perhaps in the Big Top's doorway where a solitary figure can be seen. In *Spotlights*, Cann-Clift elucidates another reason why artists have felt a kinship with circus players. Why are the performers in Cann-Clift's painting risking their necks on the Roman webs, putting on a show for an empty house? It is by now a cliché for the poet or painter to say he practices his art because he has to do so. Yet, there may be truth in the statement. Like the daredevils in the spotlights of Cann-Clift's scene, the true artist puts his life on the line for his work. It may be just fine for the artist to be rewarded for his efforts with financial support and approbation from the crowd, but in the end, the truly serious artist, like Cann-Clift's performers, works not for money or applause but for the sake of art.

Everett Shinn's scenes have a mirage-like quality, as though he observed the circus in a dimension even beyond that other-world in which it is situated in actuality. The framing of the pictures, and the unusual angles from which Shinn paints his subject matter, would please any movie director. This perhaps is not surprising, since in the teens and early twenties, Shinn worked in Hollywood as art director for several motion pictures, including Goldwyn Pictures' 1917 edition of "Polly and the Circus."³ Shinn's *Tightrope Walker* (No. 90) seems to be almost incorporeal, a weightless, wraith-

like figure walking in air. We might recall a saying by William Blake: "If the sun and the moon should doubt, they'd go out immediately."⁴ If Shinn's daredevil ever for an instant doubted he could not accomplish his stupefying feat, he would fall and be dashed to pieces.

The undated and untitled Shinn watercolor (No. 91) is pure anecdote in its depiction of players fleeing the circus with their bags as roustabouts sleep in the shadows, but this scene, too, has a reverie-like fancifulness about it. It would seem that Shinn painted this picture under some influence of *The Mountebanks Changing Place* (No. 34) by Daumier, an artist for whom he had great admiration.

No American painter looked as closely and as penetratingly at the circus nomads than did Walt Kuhn, who is represented in the show with three fine paintings, including *White Clown* (No. 55), an undisputed masterpiece in American painting. Kuhn was smitten with show business all of his life. Beginning in the 1920's, he juggled careers as an artist and as a designer and director of special acts for the New York stage, among them pantomimes and clown acts. Although his stage career seemed more successful than his art work, in 1929, in his fifty-second year, everything came together as he painted *White Clown*. A description of the painting that the critic Frank Getlein wrote for the catalogue of a 1967 Kuhn show at Kennedy Galleries in New York City can hardly be improved:

"The coloring of the picture... can hardly be called emotional. It is austere, almost black and white, yet eschewing the drama of true black and white. But 'only Euclid has looked upon beauty bare,' and it is from the austere geometry that the haunting beauty of Kuhn's art arises. The face of the *White Clown* is not particularly tragic. It is sad, somewhat tired no doubt. Mostly it is simply there: no longer crinkled into professional smiles, but now at ease in normal, introspective concern. The effect comes from the powerful, constricted geometry built up to that face. The hulking figure more than the expressive eyes carries the emotional burden of the painting."

Kuhn had gotten to know the performers of the circus and vaudeville stage intimately through his own work in show business. While Kuhn portrayed *White Clown*, *Veteran Acrobat* (No. 54) and the life size *Black Butterfly* (No. 53) as noble

beings, each of the figures reveals suffering, though not bitterness, in their lives. These studies go far beyond a realistic description of the sitters. The sadness seen in the eyes of the three circus performers is not only their own; it is Kuhn's in his feelings of compassion for them.

Pavel Tchelitchew also created numerous portraits of circus performers who reveal a tragic sense of life, but his paintings were far more romantic in tone than were Kuhn's. The subject for *Acrobat in Red Vest* (No. 95) was not, in fact, a circus performer, but rather a much tattooed friend and a favorite model for Tchelitchew, Charles Vincent.⁵ Tchelitchew featured him in several paintings—the Russian-born artist was intrigued with the idea of putting pictures inside pictures. He was able to achieve the effect of multiple imagery by doing studies of the human picture gallery that were more or less naturalistic. *Acrobat in Red Vest* and the far more visionary *Female Acrobat* (No. 94), a nude aerialist in the dizzying, rarefied air of the Big Top, owe something to Picasso's Rose Period circus paintings in that the subjects are presented in atmospheres of strange, dream-like colors.

As revealed by his *Mr. Ace* (No. 50), the vision of the circus that Yasuo Kuniyoshi had was horrific to say the least. His sinister and unsettling canvas appears to be an outcry at the savagery of men of war. Beginning in the 1920's and continuing well into the 1930's, Kuniyoshi had done a few paintings and a large series of lithographs of beautiful ladies on tight wires or the flying trapeze, perhaps making a statement on the distance between woman and man. But in the early 1940's, his circus works changed radically in their tone. The Japanese-born American artist began to paint in strident colors and his supple lines turned harshly angular. Paradoxically, while he turned to using the garish colors of a carnival midway, his paintings became gloomier in effect. The late Kuniyoshi paintings such as *Mr. Ace* are difficult to understand. We do know that Kuniyoshi was deeply troubled by World War II and its aftermath when his native Japan was still occupied by American troops. Who are *Mr. Ace* and the other masked men who appear in Kuniyoshi's late paintings, these terrifying two-faced men who pretend they are taking part in a circus. For Kuniyoshi, they apparently seemed too unreal to comprehend.

We can look to other works that reveal the highly personal feelings artists have had about the circus. Bernard Karfiol's *Circus In Dover, N.H.* (No. 49), for example—like Burford's painting, awash in a startling red that seems to have come out of a dream rather than nature—may have sprung from the artist's feelings of wonder and sad tenderness about those who travel in the caravans of dust covered wagons.

The casual circusgoer's associations with the Big Top are those of crowds, excitement, vivid color and wild dreams come true; it is quite clear from Edward Hopper's *Circus Tents* (No. 48) that the canvas hall inspired no such ideas in him. On the one hand, *Circus Tents* is a matter-of-fact transcription of a Big Top that Hopper spotted in Gloucester, Massachusetts; on the other, it is a work that so powerfully resonates with loneliness that the spirit almost possesses us.

More than other performers, the circus players are prisoners of the audience. They cannot merely present their faces to the public since they perform in the arena where their poses and movements are being studied from all angles at all times by spectators in the house. The sculptor should feel a special kinship with the circus performer. Unlike the painter, the sculptor must be concerned about how his performances appear from all sides; he, too, is a prisoner of the audience. Maybe it is natural that sculptors like Chaim Gross, Jacques Lipchitz, Elie Nadelman, Gaston Lachaise, John Flannagan and David Hare reincarnated the circus performers and animals in metal and stone.

It may be that no artist had a better opportunity as a youngster to study the mountebanks in and out of the ring than did Jacques Lipchitz. His grandfather owned a small wooden amphitheatre in Grodno, Poland, which he rented to traveling circuses and carnivals for their performances. Biographer Irene Patai sketched an impression of what it was like for Lipchitz at age 6 or 7, when he was at his grandfather's amphitheatre at one of the nightly circus performances:

"Hawkers called. Gigantic flares staked here and there within the arena. Tumblers threw discs in the air. Clowns in fantastic makeup. He could not gloss over any one impression or let several fuse together. Each one, carefully, minutely registered in his mind."⁶ Lipchitz was still enamored of the circus in 1909 when



37. Jean-Louis Forain *The Tight Rope Walker* 1885



100. Suzanne Valadon *The Circus* 1889

he came to Paris and, with Pablo Picasso, Jules Pascin, his friend Diego Rivera and scores of other artists, frequented the Cirque Medrano. His *Horseman with Fan* (No. 62), like his other circus subjects of the time, wears an expression of sorrow. In the graceful flow of its reversed-S configuration, the repetition of the fan's geometric motifs on the performer's costume, and the penetration of the woman's sadness, Lipchitz seems to have been thoroughly in control of all the work's elements. In its moderate angularity and geometric styling, the work also anticipates the move Lipchitz was shortly to make into Cubism. *Death of a Harlequin* (No. 61) was executed nearly sixty years later and is representative of the expressionistic, rather baroque late modeling style that Lipchitz employed to narrate allegories and mythological stories, many of them with brutal themes. *Death of a Harlequin* reprises a theme that might have been shown in art for the first time in a painting by J.L. Gerome of a clown mortally wounded in a duel. Picasso and Pavel Tchelitchew are among the other artists who painted scenes with dead or dying harlequins.

Lincoln Kirstein, perhaps Elie Nadelman's most ardent devotee, told us the Polish-born sculptor "loved the circus as the apogee of performing arts."⁷ Like the circus performers in the vast and clamorous arena who must rely solely on body language to make utterances to the spectators in the distant seats, Nadelman's figures reveal their personalities and express themselves through gestures. His *French Clown* (No. 74) is an amusing figure in an outsized suit, with a hat cocked at a rakish angle. It has a devil-may-care air that is conveyed by the clown's swagger and the thumb to the nose that might be read as a snubbing gesture to all who view the cavalier fellow as being out of step and out of uniform with the rest of society. Nadelman distorted the anatomy of the hand-standing *Acrobat* (No. 72) by greatly extending the limbs to suggest the seemingly impossible poses assumed by the rubber-boned circus gymnasts. The *Acrobat* wears an expression of great self-pride; it would be no small feat for a lithe young man to contort his body into such an attitude; for a man the age of the *Acrobat* to accomplish such a feat is remarkable. The arena queen and the young apprentice of Nadelman's papier-mache *Two Female Performers* (No. 73) are representative of those circus troupers

that Kirstein wittily called "ladies of the Beef Trust."⁸ They are faceless because there is no way that ordinary mortals can get to know them. As Kirstein suggested, they belong to "some superhuman species who respire only in the humid atmosphere of tanbark and greasepaint."⁹

Gaston Lachaise's bronze *Equestrienne* (No. 57) expresses his idea that feminine pulchritude can be viewed in terms of oval and circular forms. We see the round forms in the roll of the horse lady's coiffure, her pillowy breasts, her hemispheric tummy and the avoirdupois of her buttocks, hips and thighs. *Equestrienne* embodies most of the physical features of the supremely endowed female figures that would show up again and again in the sculpture of Lachaise's mature style. His biographer, Gerald Nordland, tells us that it is also likely that the work refers to Lachaise's visits to the circus as a boy.¹⁰ Lachaise himself, in a letter he wrote recounting a visit he made to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show that visited Paris in 1887, once told of having been mesmerized at the sight of a beautiful equestrienne in pink tights bobbing up and down on her horse.

John Flannagan's *Elephant* (No. 36), it has been said, was given breath and life after the artist spotted the pachyderm imprisoned in a field stone and liberated it with his chisel. The wonderful sculpture suggests both the Brobdingnagian size of circus elephants and their unusual daintiness. David Hare's *Juggler* (No. 45) recalls one of those baffling acts by circus performers who are able to stand on their heads while at the same time keeping plates, hoops and balls spinning on every limb. But the work also exists as a virtuoso performance by an artist who, with rich humor, is able to suggest almost blurring movement in a static form.

To the extent that it is possible, some artists have filed pictorial reports from the circus without revealing their personal feelings about the entertainment or its *dramatis personae*. Among the more notable examples of such works are those by Reginal Marsh, John Steuart Curry and Joel Meyerowitz. Marsh's *Pip and Flip* (No. 66) is a painting of repertorial realism. The artist has presented an objective view of a vulgar scene without condemning or glorifying it. The painting shows two spectacles—one of them on the sideshow platform and the other a mis-en-scene of ordinary people and how they are transformed when they are in a crowd. It is difficult to judge

which is the coarser of the two dramas. On stage, we see gyrating hootchie-coochie girls, along with Pip, or Flip, one of two microcephalic sisters who were crowd-pleasers in the sideshow for many years because of their nearly bald, egg-shaped heads and the claim by the circus talkers that they were "missing links" in the evolutionary chain between ape and man. How Marsh's objective representation of the pitiable woman differs from that seen on the sideshow banner where the two sisters are depicted as vixens with the physical charms of Hollywood sex symbols.

The revue taking place off stage is equally compelling. Each individual in the crowd is sharply characterized by his manner, physical appearance, and dress, or, in the case of the three women in the foreground, undress. One feels the movement of the surging mass of humanity in Marsh's picture and can almost smell the sweat and toilet water of the city people in quest of adventure, excitement and romance on a hot summer night.

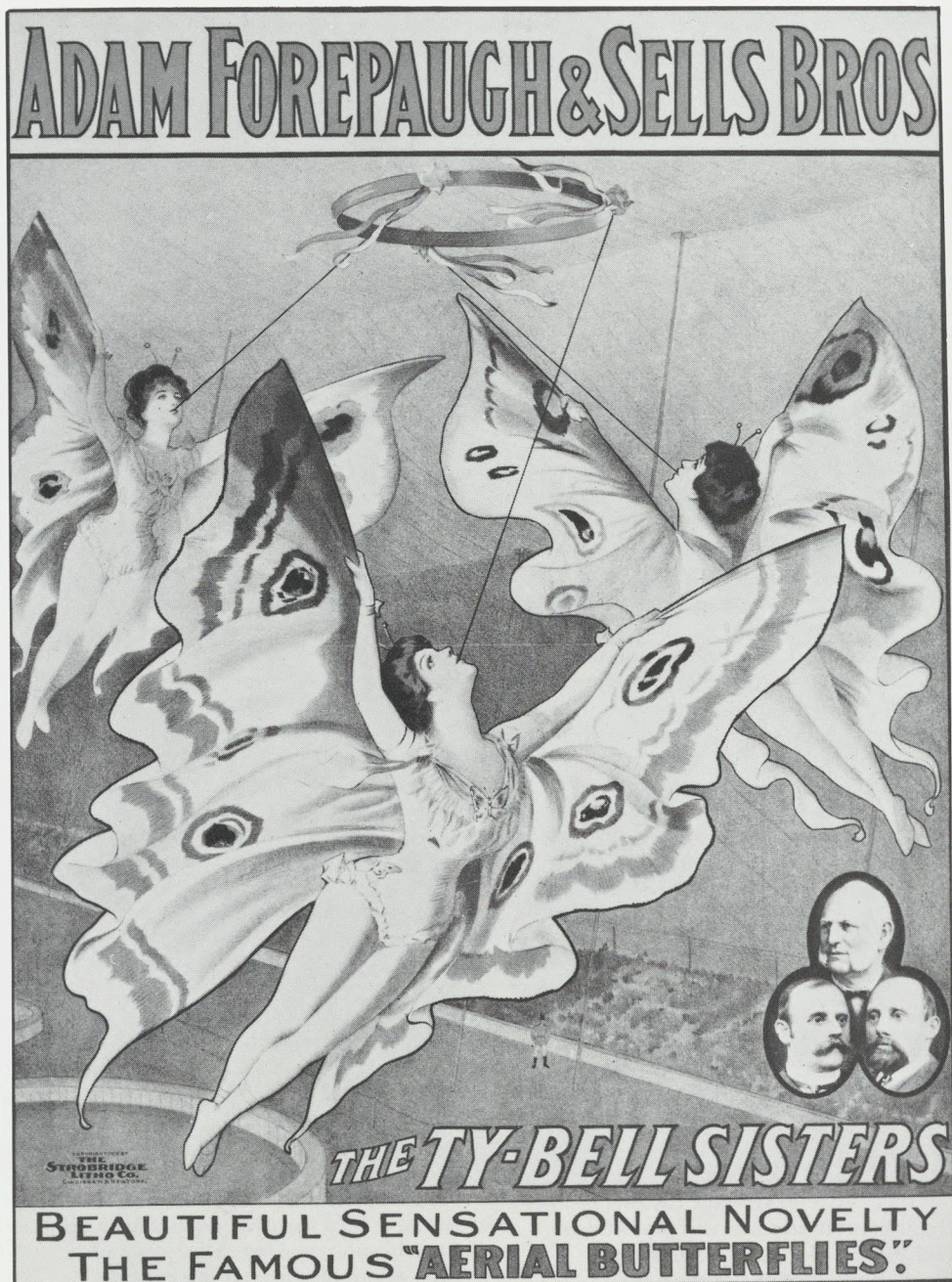
Curry's *The Flying Cadonas* (No. 32), *Circus Elephants* (No. 31) and *Clyde Beatty* (No. 33) are drawn from hundreds of drawings, watercolors and paintings that he did while traveling with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus for three months in 1932. Laurence E. Schmeckebier, in his book *John Steuart Curry's Pageant of America*, tells us that Curry joined the circus because he wanted to reinfuse his art with a dynamic quality he feared it had lost with his absorption in academic studies of nature.¹¹ Few would argue that *The Flying Cadonas* is the greatest of Curry's many circus paintings and one of the best works he did on any subject. It shows Alfredo Codona, the most renowned trapeze flyer of all time, executing his perilous triple somersault in space en route to the waiting hands of his brother Lalo. While the painting has the drama of the stupendous trapeze feat itself, it, like his *Circus Elephants* and *Clyde Beatty*, seems to show that Curry was more concerned with elements of form and design than with revealing any emotions that the circus might have stirred in him.

Photographer Meyerowitz, too, seems to have approached the circus with an objective vision. There seems not to be any trace of his personal sentiments in either *Circus Tents* (No. 70) or his extraordinarily large *Tom Laurita, Provincetown, 1977* (No. 69). *Tom Laurita* is a sad picture, even if Meyerowitz attempted to

keep his subjective feelings from entering the image. It strips away illusions we might have about the circus as being the one place in the world where we can buy magic. The performer on the bed of nails is really not a fakir who can accomplish the miraculous. He's a high school kid in tennis shoes who is probably traveling with the circus for the summer. Someone once made the observation that you can only see a circus one time—the first time. Maybe Meyerowitz's photograph corroborates the statement.

But we can't accept as an absolute truism the contention that with repeated exposure to the circus, all of its magic vanishes and we begin to see that the mountebanks are all poseurs, some of them in tennis shoes. Gifford Beal's last paintings of the circus reveal that the spectacle held as much wonder for him as it did fifty years earlier when he first began recording it. And Chaim Gross, Byron Burford and Walt Kuhn, among many others in the exhibition, convince us by their works that the clowns, dare-devils and freaks are a very special people.

1. George Heard Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe 1880-1940*, from *The Pelican History of Art* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1972), p. 118.
2. Ann and Giorgio Bacchi, "All One Family," *Christian Science Monitor* (March 23, 1976), p. 24.
3. Edith De Shazo, *Everett Shinn: 1876-1953* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., Publisher), p. 113.
4. William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1968), Unpaginated.
5. Parker Tyler, *The Divine Comedy of Pavel Tchelitchev* (New York: Fleet Publishing Corporation, 1967), p. 344.
6. Irene Patai, *Encounters: The Life of Jacques Lipchitz* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1961), p. 22.
7. Lincoln Kirstein, *The Sculpture of Elie Nadelman* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1948), p. 52.
8. Lincoln Kirstein, "Elie Nadelman: Sculptor of the Dancer," *Dance Index*, Vol. VII, No. 6 (1948), p. 149.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Gerald Nordland, Director, Milwaukee Art Museum, in conversation with author.
11. Laurence E. Schmeckebier, *John Stuart Curry's Pageant of America* (New York: American Artists Group, 1943), p. 62, 207.



137. Forepaugh & Sells Bros. *Aerial Butterflies* 1910



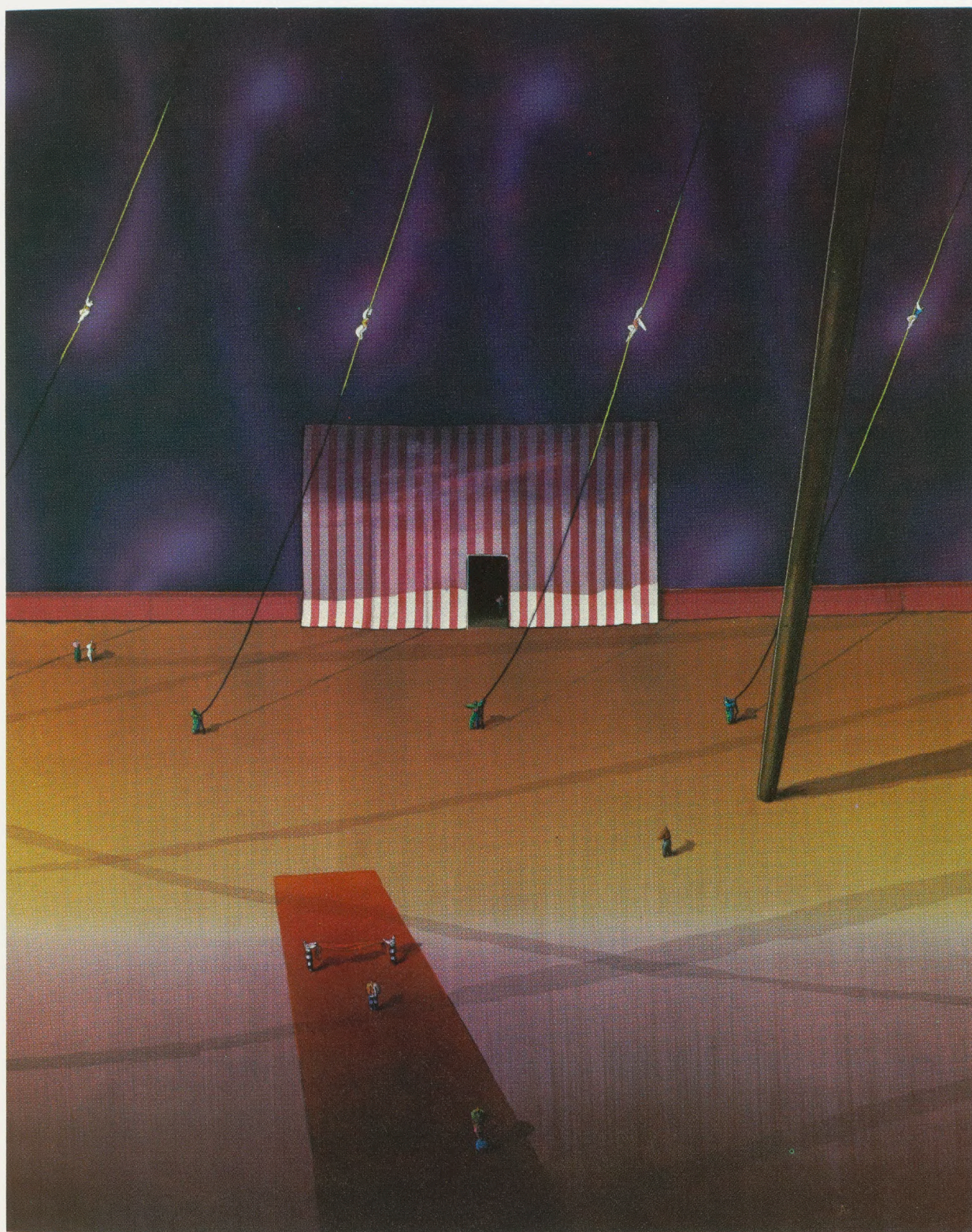
9. Gifford Beal *Circus Day* 1910



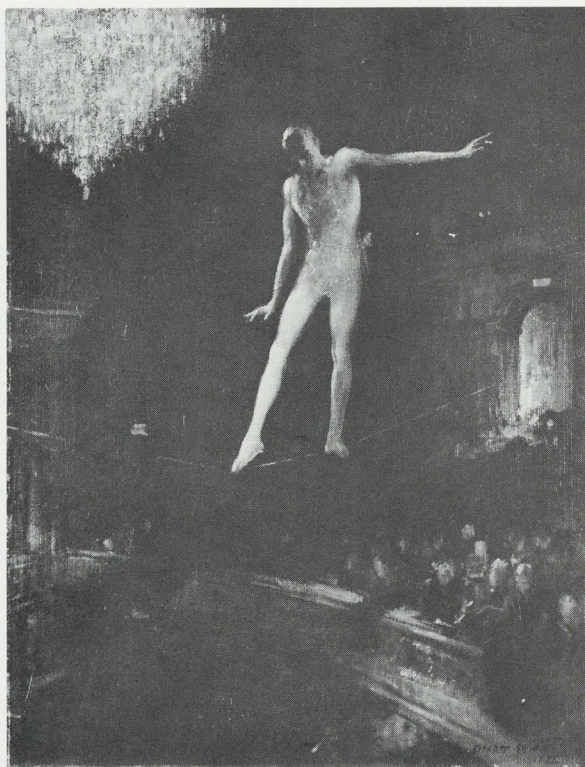
101. Robert Weaver *Butterfly Ladies* 1977



11. Gifford Beal *Circus Performer* circa 1930



28. Alison Cann-Clift *Spotlights* 1980



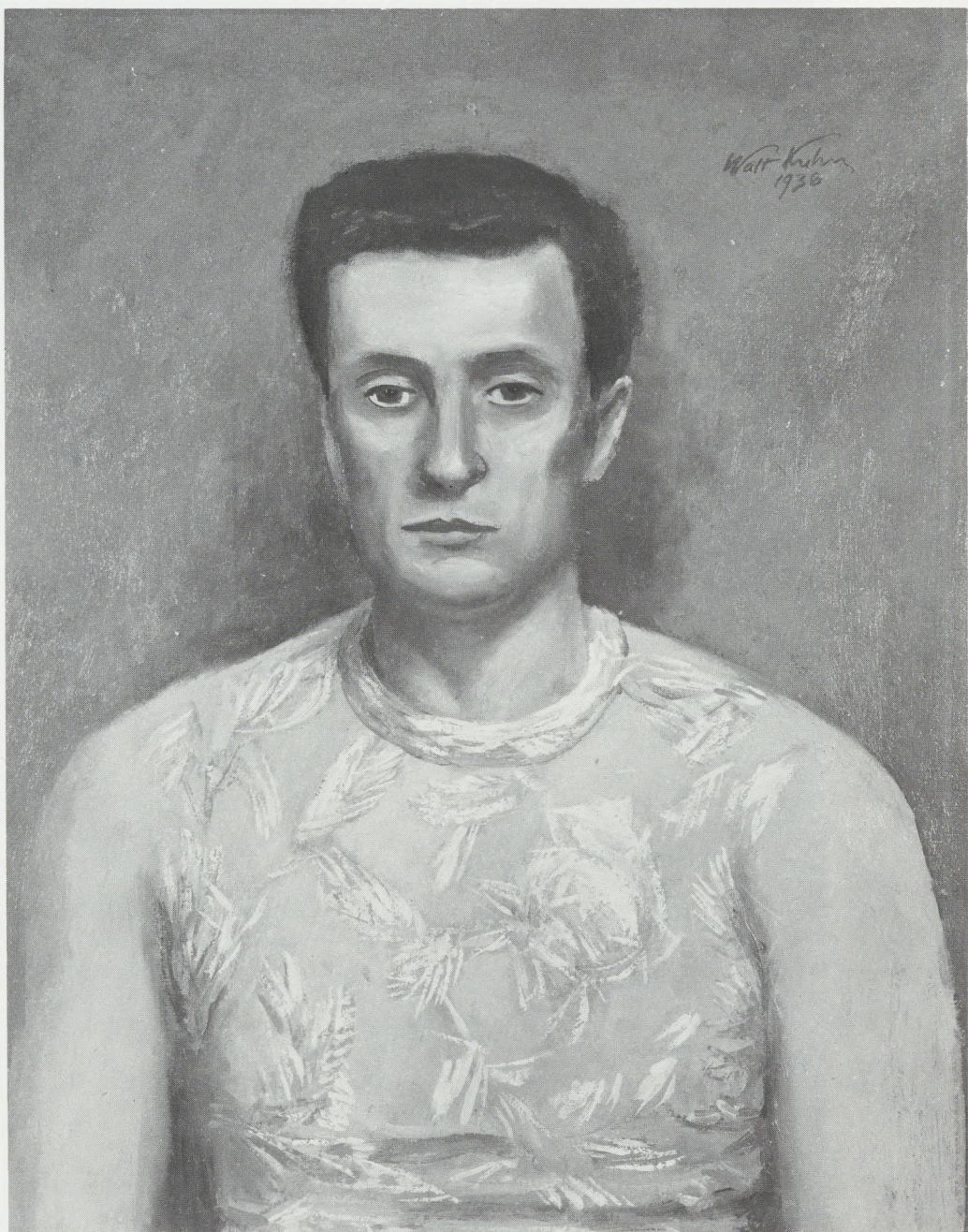
90. Everett Shinn *The Tightrope Walker*



91. Everett Shinn *Untitled*



55. Walt Kuhn *The White Clown* 1929



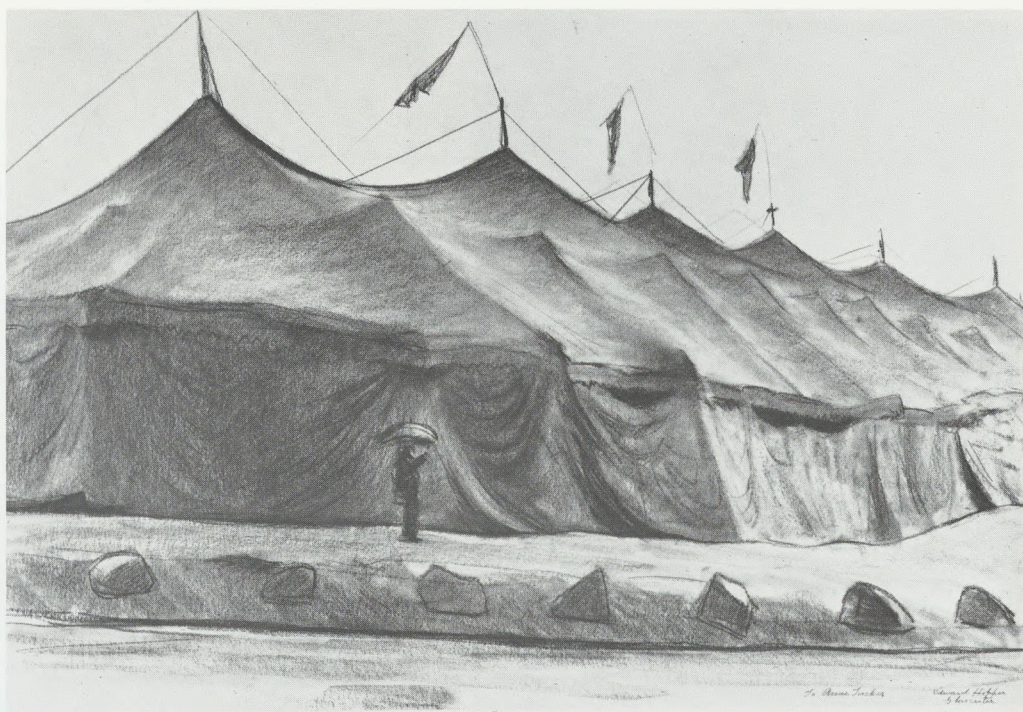
54. Walt Kuhn *Veteran Acrobat* 1938



53. Walt Kuhn *Black Butterfly* 1946



95. Pavel Tchelitchev *Acrobat in Red Vest* circa 1932



48. Edward Hopper *Circus Tents*



49. Bernard Karfiol *Circus in Dover, N.H.* 1940



56. Yasuo Kuniyoshi *Mr. Ace* 1952



61. Jacques Lipchitz *Death of a Harlequin* 1971



62. Jacques Lipchitz
Horsewoman With Fan 1913



74. Elie Nadelman *French Clown* circa 1914



72. Elie Nadelman *Acrobat* 1916



73. Elie Nadelman *Two Female Performers* circa 1934



33. John Stuart Curry *Clyde Beatty* 1932



36. John Flannagan *Elephant* 1929-30



57. Gaston Lachaise *The Equestrienne*



32. John Stuart Curry *The Flying Cadonas* 1932

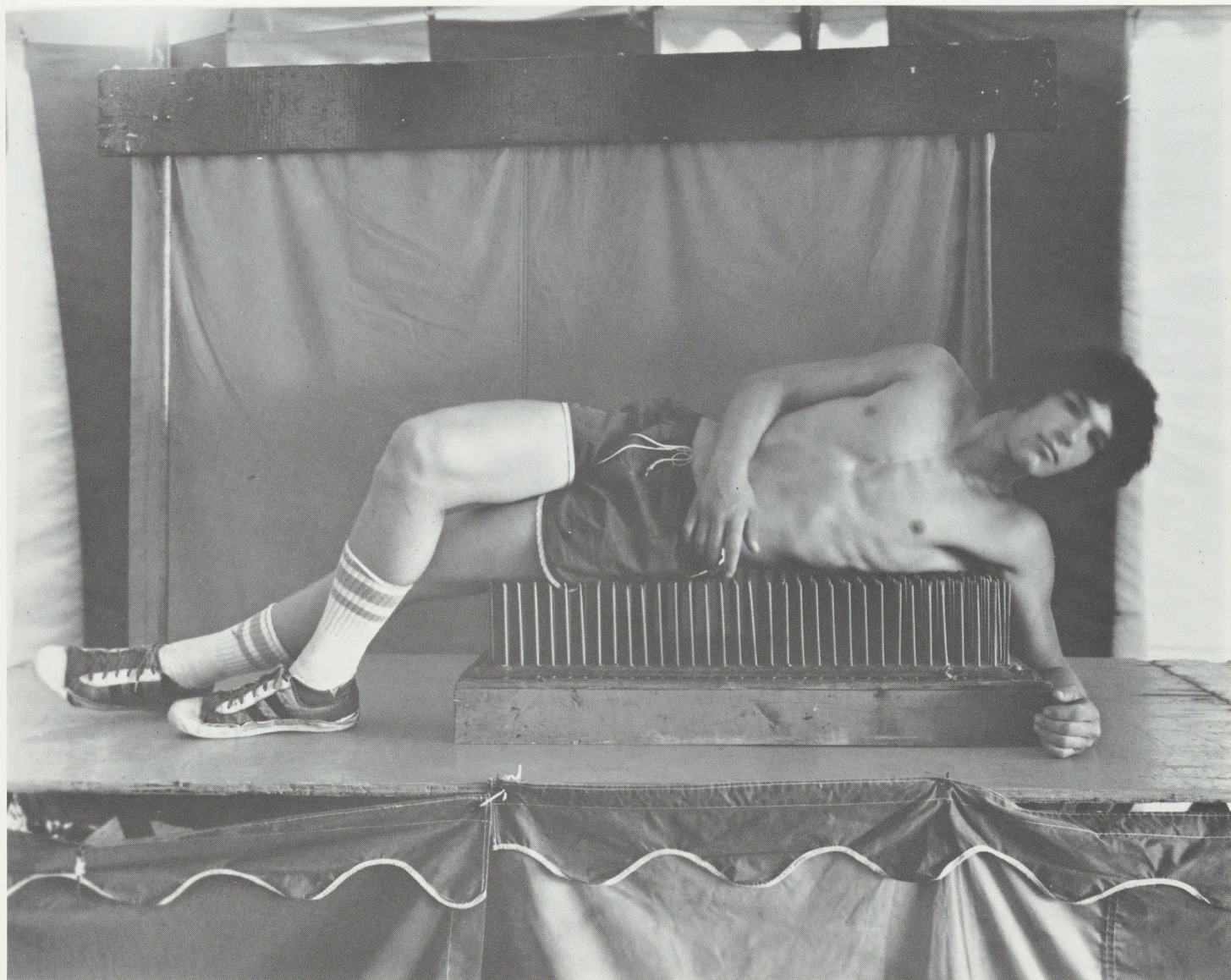


15. Aaron Bohrod *Clown Alley* 1949-50

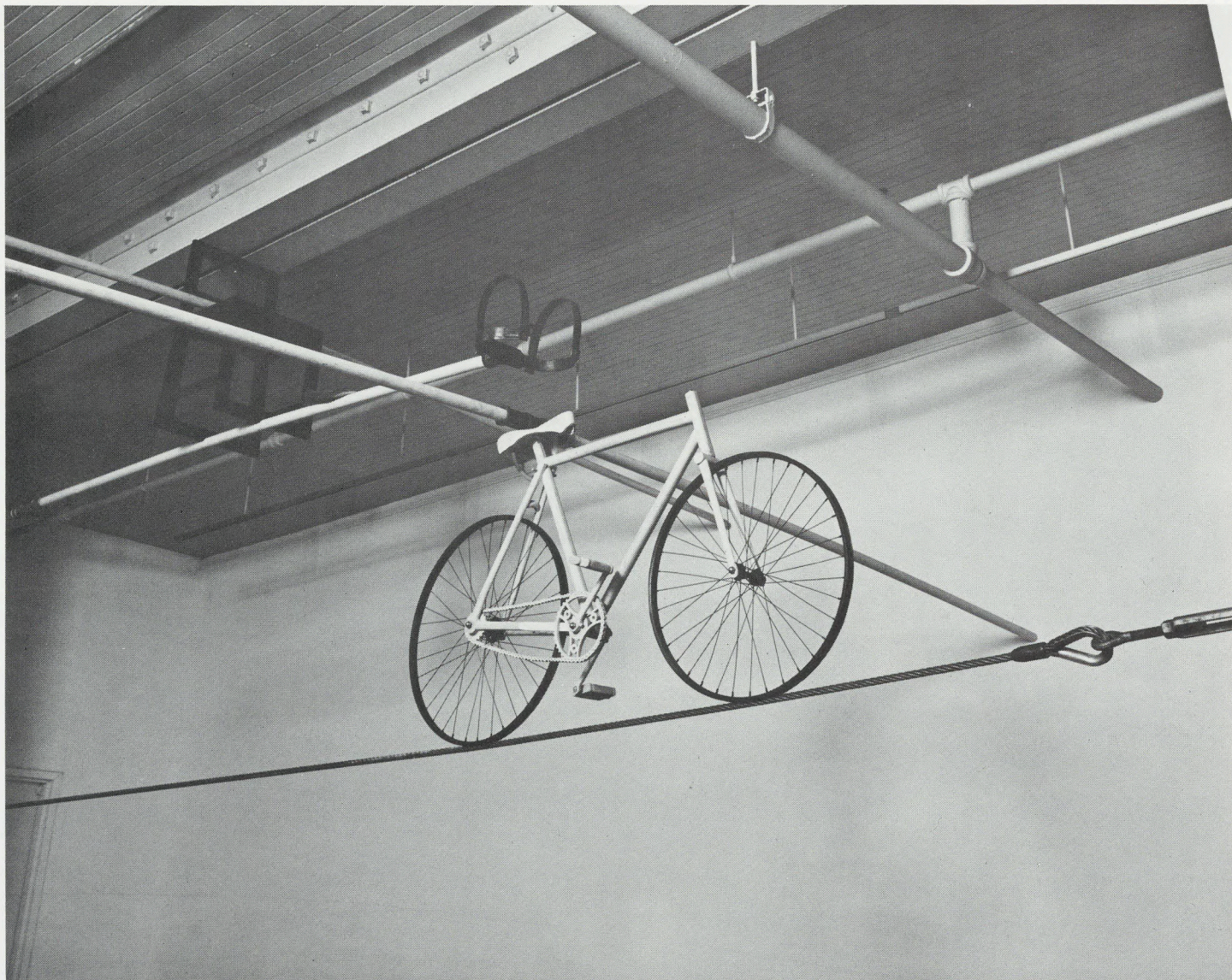


45. David Hare *Juggler* 1950-51

CONCLUSION



69. Joel Meyerowitz *Tom Laurita, Provincetown 1977* (Color photograph)



60. Steven Linn *For Karl Wallenda* 1979

CONCLUSION

The wind was brisk as Karl Wallenda put a slippered foot on the 200 foot long wire strung 120 feet above the ground between the Condado Holiday Inn and the Flamboyant Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The 73-year-old daredevil moved cautiously and with the light-footedness of a cat as he began his skywalk. Suddenly the winds from the sea began to pick up and halfway across the wire, Wallenda started leaning at a severe angle into the wind. The long balancing bar in his hands began to seesaw, while the crowd below began to cry out, "Sit down, sit down." Then Wallenda fell. Still clinging to his balancing bar, he plummeted through space like some great bird that had been blasted on the wing by a shotgun. His plunge ended when he crashed onto the roof of a taxicab and then bounced to the street.¹

Four members of the Wallenda family had been killed in earlier falls from the high wire. Another Wallenda, Karl's son Mario, was left paralyzed for life after falling from the wire. After Karl Wallenda's fatal fall on March 27, 1978, there were those who said he must have been mad to have attempted such a stunt, especially at his age. There were those who condemned the authorities because they had not acted to prevent the septuagenarian from making the skywalk. His death, they said, had been senseless.

The claim might be disputed by Steven Linn, whose haunting installation work, *For Karl Wallenda* (No. 60), is included in *Center Ring: The Artist*. And Linn's belief that Wallenda's death was not senseless but, in ways, admirable and brilliant, would be shared by other artists in the exhibition.

Wallenda's death may, in the extreme, symbolize why so many great artists have had a respect for the circus performer that borders on veneration. Wallenda lived for his art and he finally died for it. It could even be said that he did something more: he took death—the most useless of all things to the artist—and used it, converted it into the substance of his final creation.

While there are some artists who seek to choose the circus as a calling, the circus, in the end, chooses its artists. Only the very good survive—and the faithful. The circus will not countenance anything less than full devotion from those who would step into the sawdust ring. Pierre Bost was quite right when he observed, "A circus performer must consecrate his whole life to his work."²

The great English juggler Enrico Rastelli, for example, rehearsed for eight hours a day, every day, in addition to making his ring appearances, so he would never lose his astonishing ability to keep 10 plates in the air simultaneously. Tito Gaona practices every day so that he might someday present a feat that has never been seen under the Big Top—four backward somersaults from the flying trapeze to the hands of a catcher. Gaona shows a sense of urgency in his quest to accomplish something that up to now is still humanly impossible. He is mindful of the ticking clock. At thirty-two, he knows that unless he accomplishes the elusive "quadruple" rather soon, his years will knock him out of the competition.³

The jugglers and daredevils are not alone in fully turning over their lives to the circus. The human picture galleries seen in Pavel Tchelitchew's *Acrobat in Red Vest* (No. 95) and Diane Arbus' *Tattooed Man* (No. 1) have mutilated bodies for their art. And the fat ladies of Edward Paschke's *Heavy Shoe* (No. 76) and Byron Burford's *Bally with Ruth* (No. 20) are eating themselves to death for their art. It may all be perverse, mad, but the circus performers' madness may be close to that referred to by Hokusai when he described himself as "an old man mad about drawing."

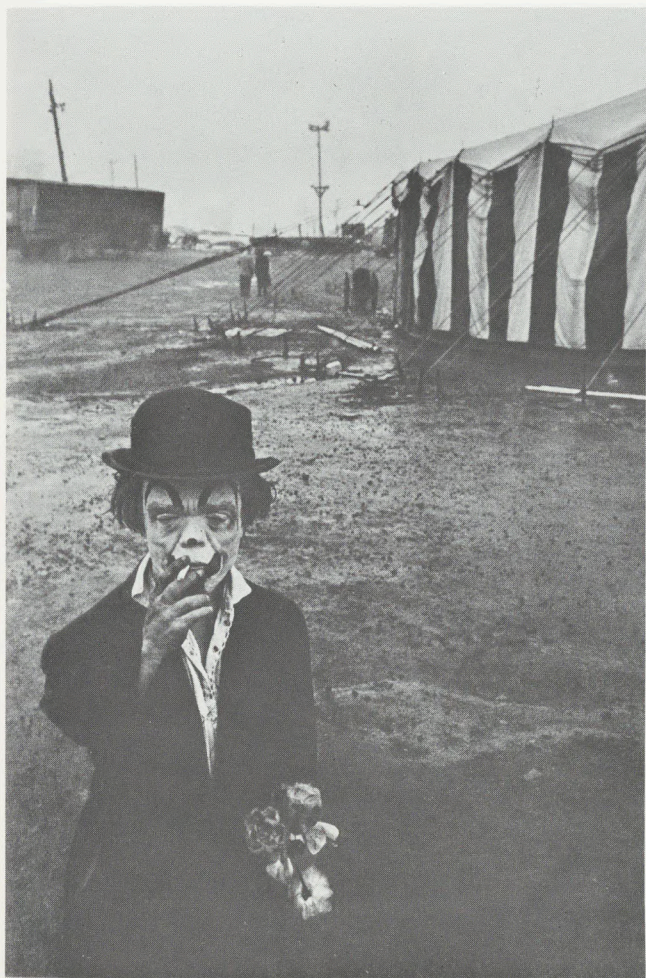
"Who are they, these *saltimbanques*, even more fleeting than we ourselves...?" the poet Rainer Maria Rilke asks. Maybe he would be satisfied with an answer which could be applied to artists as well, offered by another member of his profession, Henry Miller:

"They are emancipated beings. For them the world is not what it seems to us. They see with other eyes. We say of them that they have died to the world. They live in the moment, fully, and the radiance that emanates from them is a perpetual song of joy."⁴

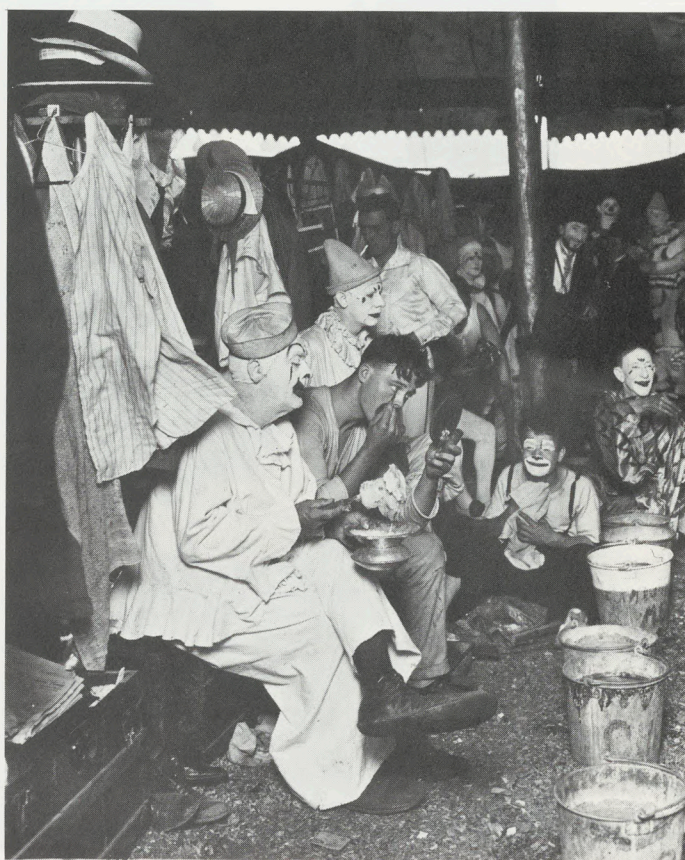
1. Associated Press and United Press International wire service accounts (March 27-29, 1978).
2. Pierre Bost, "Le Cirque et ses Amis," translated by Paulette Cushman, *Le Revue Paris* (March, 1935), p. 169.
3. Dean Jensen, "Tito Gaona: Quadruple Impossible?" *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, part 4 (August 31, 1979), p. 10, 15-16.
4. Henry Miller, *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pierce, 1948), p. 116.



1. Diane Arbus *Tattooed Man* 1970



35. Bruce Davidson *New Jersey*, 1958



6. Harry Atwell *Clown Alley* circa 1929



76. Edward Paschke *Heavy Shoe* 1969



21. Paul Cadmus *Gilding the Acrobat*

CATALOGUE: FINE ART

All dimensions are in inches; height by width by depth.
An asterisk (*) indicates item is illustrated in the catalogue.

- * 1. Diane Arbus American 1923-1971
Tattooed Man 1970
Photograph, print by Neil Selkirk
14 1/2 x 14 1/2"
Lent by Lunn Gallery, Washington, D.C.
- * 2. Diane Arbus American 1923-1971
Albino Sword Swallower 1970
Photograph, print by Neil Selkirk
14 1/2 x 14 1/2"
Lent by Lunn Gallery, Washington, D.C.
- * 3. William Wykeham Archer English
1808-1864
Bartholomew Fair
Watercolor
9 1/2 x 14 1/2"
Lent by Illinois State University, Milner
Library Circus Collection, Normal,
Illinois
- * 4. Robert Arneson American 1930-
Clown 1978
Drawing, conte crayon
41 5/8 x 29 7/8"
Lent by Des Moines Art Center,
Director's Discretionary Fund from the
Gardner and Florence Call Cowles
Foundation, 1979, Des Moines, Iowa
- * 5. Eugene Atget French 1857-1927
Untitled
Photograph, print by Berenice Abbott
8 x 10"
Lent by The Witkin Gallery, Inc.,
New York, New York
- * 6. Harry Atwell American 1879-1957
Clown Alley circa 1929
Black and white photograph
8 x 10"
Lent by Dean Jensen, Milwaukee,
Wisconsin
- * 7. Milton Avery American 1893-1965
Chariot Race 1933
Oil on paperboard
48 x 72"
Lent by Estate of Milton Avery: Courtesy
Borgenicht Gallery, New York,
New York
- * 8. William Baziotis American 1912-1963
Circus Abstraction 1946
Oil on canvas
32 1/2 x 24"
Lent by Suzanne Vanderwoude,
New York, New York
- * 9. Gifford Beal American 1879-1956
Circus Day 1910
Gouache
21 7/16 x 32 3/8"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur G. Altschul,
New York, New York
- 10. Gifford Beal American 1879-1956
Parade of Elephants 1924
Oil on canvas
36 x 58 3/4"
Lent by The Phillips Collection,
Washington, D.C.
- * 11. Gifford Beal American 1879-1956
Circus Performer circa 1930
Oil on canvas
48 x 36"
Lent by Kraushaar Galleries, New York,
New York
- * 12. Romare Bearden American 1914-
The Circus 1961
Collage
26 x 22"
Lent by Cordier & Ekstrom, Inc.,
New York, New York
- * 13. Max Beckmann German 1884-1950
Acrobat on Trapeze 1940
Oil on Canvas
57 1/2 x 35 1/2"
Lent by Collection of Morton D. May,
St. Louis, Missouri
- 14. Robert Blum American 1857-1903
Circus Ring at Night circa 1880
Oil on canvas
14 1/2 x 19"
Lent by The Regis Collection,
Minneapolis, Minnesota
- * 15. Aaron Bohrod American 1907-
Clown Alley 1949-50
Oil on masonite
20 1/8 x 27"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Avery Sherry,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- * 16. Camille Bombois French 1883-1970
Clown and Dancer 1935
Oil on canvas
32 x 25 1/2"
Lent by Perls Gallery, New York,
New York
- * 17. Mathew Brady American 1823/24-1896
*Portfolio of Attractions in P.T. Barnum's
American Museum*
James Murphy, The Irish Giant;
Anna Swan and the Lilliputian King;
Jane Campbell, the Fat Lady;
* Chang and Eng, The Siamese Twins;
Mrs. Myers, the Bearded Lady;
Tom Thumb, and His Wife;
* Isaac Sprague, the Living Skeleton;
Barnum and Ernestine de Faiber
Set of eight photographs
3 1/2 x 2 3/4"
Lent by Time-Life Books, Inc.,
New York, New York
- * 18. W.H. Brown American
Bareback Riders 1886
Oil on cardboard
18 1/2 x 24 1/2"
Lent by National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.
- * 19. Byron Browne American 1907-1961
Two Clowns 1948
Oil on canvas
30 x 38"
Lent by Washburn Gallery, New York,
New York
- * 20. Byron Burford American 1920-
Bally with Ruth 1980
Alkyd on canvas
62 x 82"
Lent by Davenport Art Gallery,
Davenport, Iowa
- * 21. Paul Cadmus American 1904-
Gilding the Acrobat (Study)
Drawing, pen and ink
12 x 6"
Lent by Robert Hull Fleming Museum,
University of Vermont, Burlington,
Vermont
- * 22. Alexander Calder American 1898-1976
Acrobat (toy) 1926
Cotton, leather, wire
7 1/4 x 2 x 1/2"
Lent by Margaret Calder Hayes, trustee
Margaret Calder Hayes Trust,
Berkeley, California
- * 23. Alexander Calder American 1898-1976
Dog for the Fratellini Brothers 1927
Rubber pipe and wire
3 x 7 1/2 x 3"
Margaret Calder Hayes, trustee
Margaret Calder Hayes Trust,
Berkeley, California
- * 24. Alexander Calder American 1898-1976
Blue Cow 1926
Velveteen, stuffing and wire
6 1/2 x 6 1/2 x 4"
Lent by Margaret Calder Hayes, trustee,
Margaret Calder Hayes Trust,
Berkeley, California
- * 25. Alexander Calder American 1898-1976
The Circus 1932
Ink drawing
20 1/4 x 29 1/4"
Lent by Perls Galleries, New York,
New York
- * 26. Alexander Calder American 1898-1976
Rearing Stallion circa 1928
Wire sculpture
22 3/4 x 13 1/2 x 9 3/4"
Lent by Perls Galleries, New York,
New York
- * 27. Mary Callery American 1903-
Equilibrist 1949
Polychromed iron
72"
Lent by Washburn Gallery, New York,
New York
- * 28. Alison Cann-Clift Canadian 1949-
Spotlights 1980
Fabric
72 x 84"
Lent by Pucker/Safrai Gallery, Inc.,
Boston, Massachusetts

- * 29. Marc Chagall Russian 1887-
Le Grand Cirque 1968
Oil on canvas
67 x 63"
Lent by Pierre Matisse Gallery,
New York, New York
30. Russell Cowles American 1887-1979
Snake Charmer 1941
Oil on canvas
27 7/8 x 30 1/2"
Lent by Des Moines Art Center, Bequest
of Artist, Des Moines, Iowa
31. John Steuart Curry American 1897-1946
Circus Elephants 1932
Oil on canvas
25 1/4 x 36 1/8"
Lent by National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.
- * 32. John Steuart Curry American 1897-1946
The Flying Cadonas 1932
Tempera and oil on composition board
36 x 30"
Lent by Whitney Museum of American
Art, New York, New York
- * 33. John Steuart Curry American 1897-1946
Clyde Beatty 1932
Oil on canvas
20 1/2 x 30 1/2"
Lent by Kennedy Galleries, Inc.,
New York, New York
- * 34. Honore Daumier French 1808-1879
The Montebanks Changing Place
circa 1865
Wash drawing
14 1/4 x 11"
Lent by Wadsworth Atheneum, The Ella
Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin
Sumner Collection, Hartford,
Connecticut (Milwaukee only)
- * 35. Bruce Davidson American 1933-
New Jersey, 1958
Photograph
14 x 11"
Lent by Dean Jensen, Milwaukee,
Wisconsin
- * 36. John Flannagan American 1895-1942
Elephant 1929-30
Bluestone
13 1/2 x 15 x 8"
Lent by Whitney Museum of American
Art, New York, New York
- * 37. Jean-Louis Forain French 1852-1931
The Tight Rope Walker 1885
Oil on canvas
18 3/16 x 15"
Lent by The Art Institute of Chicago,
Gift of Emily Crane Chadbourne,
Chicago, Illinois
38. Karl Free American 1903-1947
Zebra-Equus Burchelli
Oil on canvas
26 x 36"
Lent by Robert Hull Fleming Museum,
University of Vermont, Burlington,
Vermont
39. Jill Freedman American
Circus Elephants 1971, print 1975
Black and white photograph
11 x 14"
Lent by The Witkin Gallery, Inc.,
New York, New York
- * 40. A.B. Frost American 1851-1928
The Circus
Gouache
14 1/2 x 20"
Lent by Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc.,
New York, New York (Milwaukee only)
- * 41. Lee Gatch American 1902-1968
The Acrobat 1960
Oil and collage on canvas
43 1/2 x 35 1/2"
Lent by Staempfli Gallery, New York,
New York
42. John Graham American 1890-1961
Harlequin and Heavy Horses 1927
Oil on canvas
18 x 22"
Lent by The Phillips Collection,
Washington, D.C.
- * 43. Chaim Gross American 1904-
Unicyclist 1978
Bronze
88"
Lent by Forum Gallery, New York,
New York
- * 44. William Hahn American 1829-1887
The Circus (It's My Turn) 1882
Oil on canvas
34 x 26 3/4"
Lent by The Oakland Museum, Gift of
The Kahn Foundation, Oakland,
California
- * 45. David Hare American 1917-
Juggler 1950-51
Steel
80 1/4 x 27 3/4 x 22"
Lent by Whitney Museum of American
Art, New York, New York
- * 46. Hans Hofmann American 1880-1966
Pierrot 1954
Oil on cardboard
25 1/2 x 21 1/2"
Lent by Andre Emmerich Gallery,
New York, New York
- * 47. William Hogarth English 1697-1764
Southwark Fair 1733-34
Etching
14 5/16 x 18 9/16"
Lent by Elvehjem Museum of Art,
Madison, Wisconsin
- * 48. Edward Hopper American 1882-1967
Circus Tents
Drawing, charcoal, paper
14 1/2 x 22"
Lent by Dorothy D. Dennison,
Youngstown, Ohio
- * 49. Bernard Karfiol American 1886-1952
Circus in Dover, N.H. 1940
Oil on canvas
36 x 46"
Lent by Forum Gallery, New York,
New York
50. Henry Keller American 1869-1949
Storm Frightened Animals 1933
Oil on canvas
30 1/16 x 40"
Lent by The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Gift from J.H. Wade Fund, Cleveland,
Ohio
- * 51. Anne Kingsbury American
Circus Blanket 1976
Fabric
12 x 8'
Lent by the Artist, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- * 52. Paul Klee Swiss 1879-1940
Tightrope Walker 1921
Color lithograph on butte paper
17 1/8 x 10 1/8"
Lent by The Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum, New York, New York
- * 53. Walt Kuhn American 1877-1949
Black Butterfly 1946
Oil on canvas
72 x 32 1/4"
Lent by Kennedy Galleries, Inc.,
New York, New York
- * 54. Walt Kuhn American 1877-1949
Veteran Acrobat 1938
Oil on canvas
24 x 20"
Lent by Columbus Museum of Art,
Purchase by Special Subscription,
Columbus, Ohio
- * 55. Walt Kuhn American 1877-1949
The White Clown 1929
Oil on canvas
40 1/4 x 30 1/4"
Lent by National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.
- * 56. Yasuo Kuniyoshi American 1893-1953
Mr. Ace 1952
Oil on canvas
46 x 26"
Lent by The Baltimore Museum of Art,
Edward Joseph Gallagher III Memorial,
Collection, Baltimore, Maryland
- * 57. Gaston Lachaise American 1882-1935
The Equestrienne
Bronze
11 x 10 x 5"
Lent by The Corcoran Gallery of Art,
Gift of Francis Biddle, Washington, D.C.

- * 58. Rico Lebrun American 1900-1964
Seated Clown 1941
Ink, pen, brush
39 1/2 x 29"
Lent by The Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur B. Sachs, Santa Barbara, California
- * 59. Fernand Leger French 1881-1955
The Two Acrobats 1942-43
Oil on canvas
49 1/2 x 57"
Lent by Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, New York (Columbus, Albany, Washington, D.C. only)
- * 60. Steven Linn American 1943-
For Karl Wallenda 1979
Bronze and wood
12 x 20 x 20"
Lent by Louis K. Meisel Gallery, New York, New York
- * 61. Jacques Lipchitz French 1891-1973
Death of a Harlequin 1971
Bronze
12 1/2 x 17 1/4"
Lent by Marlborough Gallery, New York, New York
- * 62. Jacques Lipchitz French 1891-1973
Horsewoman With Fan 1913
Bronze
27 1/4 x 7 5/8 x 6 1/2"
Lent by Marlborough Gallery, New York, New York
- * 63. George Luks American 1867-1933
A Clown
Oil on canvas
24 x 20"
Lent by Museum of Fine Arts, Bequest of John T. Spaulding, Boston, Massachusetts
- * 64. Loren MacIver American 1909-
Emmett Kelly 1947
Oil on canvas
40 x 32"
Lent by Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, College at Purchase, Gift of Roy R. Neuberger, Purchase, New York
65. John Marin American 1870-1953
Circus Elephants 1941
Crayon and wash
19 x 24 3/4"
Lent by The Art Institute of Chicago, Alfred Stieglitz Collection and the Waller Fund, Chicago, Illinois
- * 66. Reginald Marsh American 1898-1954
Pip and Flip 1932
Tempera on board
48 1/4 x 48 1/2"
Lent by Terra Museum of American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, Evanston, Illinois
- * 67. Henri Matisse French 1869-1954
The Codomas 1944
Colored stencil
17 3/8 x 13 1/2"
Lent by Richard S. Zeisler Collection, New York, New York
68. Henri Matisse French 1869-1954
L'Avaleur de Sabres (The Sword Swallow) 1943-44
Colored stencil
17 3/8 x 26 1/2"
Lent by Richard S. Zeisler Collection, New York, New York
- * 69. Joel Meyerowitz American 1938-
Tom Laurita, Provincetown 1977
Color photograph
32 x 40"
Lent by The Witkin Gallery, Inc., New York, New York
70. Joel Meyerowitz American 1938-
Circus Tent, Spain 1967
Color photograph
8 x 10"
Lent by The Witkin Gallery, Inc., New York, New York
- * 71. Robert Motherwell American 1915-
The Three Clowns 1945
Ink and gouache on Strathmore
11 1/2 x 14 1/2"
Lent by Private Collection, New York, New York
- * 72. Elie Nadelman American 1882-1946
Acrobat 1916
Bronze
14 1/2"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. E. Jan Nadelman, New York, New York
- * 73. Elie Nadelman American 1882-1946
Two Female Performers circa 1934
Papier-mache
16 1/2"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. E. Jan Nadelman, New York, New York
- * 74. Elie Nadelman American 1882-1946
French Clown circa 1914
Bronze
7 1/4"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. E. Jan Nadelman, New York, New York
- * 75. Kenneth Noland American 1924-
Clown 1969
Oil on canvas
46 1/8 x 46"
Lent by National Gallery of Art, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Wetmore, Washington, D.C.
- * 76. Edward Paschke American 1938-
Heavy Shoe 1969
Oil on canvas
48 x 40"
Lent by Collection of Joseph Shapiro, Chicago, Illinois
- * 77. Jules Pascin French 1885-1930
Le Cirque Pascin 1910
Oil on canvas
28 x 31 1/2"
Lent by Private Collection, New York, New York
78. Waldo Peirce American 1884-1970
After the Show 1933
Oil on canvas
32 x 46"
Lent by Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York
- * 79. Pablo Picasso Spanish 1881-1973
Circus Family 1905
Drypoint
11 5/16 x 12 7/8"
Lent by The Baltimore Museum of Art, The Cone Collection formed by Dr. Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland
- * 80. Pablo Picasso Spanish 1881-1973
La Toilette de la Mere 1905
Etching
9 1/4 x 7"
Lent by The Baltimore Museum of Art, The Cone Collection, formed by Dr. Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland
- * 81. Pablo Picasso Spanish 1881-1973
The Jester 1905
Bronze
16 1/8 x 14"
Lent by The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.
- * 82. Alton Pickens American 1917-
Acrobat 1947
Oil on canvas
50 x 35"
Lent by Earle Ludgin, Hubbards Woods, Illinois
- * 83. Abraham Rattner American 1895-1978
The Clown 1964
Oil on canvas
51 x 38"
Lent by Kennedy Galleries, Inc., New York, New York
- * 84. Georges Rouault French 1871-1958
The Little Dwarf
Color etching
12 1/2 x 8 1/4"
Lent by The Art Institute of Chicago, The Albert H. Wolf Collection, Chicago, Illinois
85. Georges Rouault French 1871-1958
Seated Clown (from Cirque de L'Etoile Filante) 1930
Aquatint
20 1/2 x 7"
Lent by The Art Institute of Chicago, Bequest of Virginia Croon, Chicago, Illinois

86. Georges Rouault French 1871-1958
Two Female Circus Riders circa 1933
Oil on board
23 x 16"
Lent by The Baltimore Museum of Art,
The Cone Collection formed by
Dr. Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone
of Baltimore, Maryland
- * 87. Harry C. Rubincam American ?-1941
Bareback Rider 1905
Photogravure
8 x 6"
Lent by Photography Collection,
Humanities Research Center, The
University of Texas at Austin, Texas
- * 88. August Sander German 1876-1964
Circus People 1930
Photograph, print by Gunther Sander, 1980
8 1/2 x 11 1/4"
Sander Gallery: Estate of August Sander,
Washington, D.C.
- * 89. Georges Seurat French 1859-1891
La Parade (Study)
Conte crayon
12 1/2 x 9 1/2"
Lent by The Phillips Collection,
Washington, D.C.
- * 90. Everett Shinn American 1876-1953
The Tightrope Walker
Oil on canvas
23 3/4 x 18"
Lent by Goffman-Schur Galleries, Inc.,
New York, New York
- * 91. Everett Shinn American 1876-1953
Untitled
Watercolor
19 1/8 x 20 5/8"
Lent by Everett Reese, Columbus, Ohio
- * 92. Charles John Smith English 1803-38
Interior View of Astley's Amphitheatre
Engraving after original drawing by
William Capon in 1777
8 1/2 x 10 1/2"
Lent by Illinois State University, Milner
Library Circus Collection, Normal,
Illinois
93. Charles John Smith English 1803-38
Exterior View of Astley's Amphitheatre
Engraving after original drawing by
William Capon in 1777
8 1/2 x 10 1/2"
Lent by Illinois State University, Milner
Library Circus Collection, Normal,
Illinois
94. Pavel Tchelitchew Russian 1898-1957
Female Acrobat
Oil on canvas
32 1/8 x 39 1/2"
Lent by The Regis Collection,
Minneapolis, Minnesota
- * 95. Pavel Tchelitchew Russian 1898-1957
Acrobat in Red Vest circa 1932
Oil on board
41 1/2 x 29 3/4"
Lent by The Regis Collection,
Minneapolis, Minnesota
- * 96. James Tissot French 1836-1902
The Ladies of the Cars 1885
Etching and drypoint
15 3/4 x 9 15/16"
Lent by The Minneapolis Institute of
Arts, The Herschel V. Jones Fund, by
exchange, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- * 97. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec French
1864-1901
At the Circus: Chocolat 1899
Chalk and gouache
10 x 14"
Lent by Sterling and Francine Clark Art
Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts
(Milwaukee and Washington, D.C. only)
98. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec French
1864-1901
Footit and Chocolat 1895
Lithograph
9 5/16 x 9 11/16"
Lent by The Art Institute of Chicago,
Gift of Karl O. Schniewind, Chicago,
Illinois
99. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec French
1864-1901
The Seated Clowness, Chao-U-Kao 1896
Lithograph
20 1/2 x 15 3/4"
Milwaukee Art Museum Collection, Gift
of Mrs. Harry Lynde Bradley
- *100. Suzanne Valadon French 1867-1938
The Circus 1889
Oil on canvas
19 3/16 x 23 1/2"
Lent by Cleveland Museum of Art,
Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Collection,
Cleveland, Ohio
- *101. Robert Weaver American 1913-
Butterfly Ladies 1977
Pastel
60 1/4 x 40 1/4"
Lent by Indiana State Museum,
Department of Natural Resources,
Indianapolis, Indiana
- *102. Max Weber American 1881-1961
Acrobats 1946
Oil on canvas
48 x 58"
Lent by Forum Gallery, New York,
New York
- *103. H.C. Westermann American 1922-
Freaks 1978
Watercolor
22 x 30"
Lent by Private Collection, Des Moines,
Iowa

PRINTERS' INK, PASTE BUCKETS AND OTHER APPURTENANCES

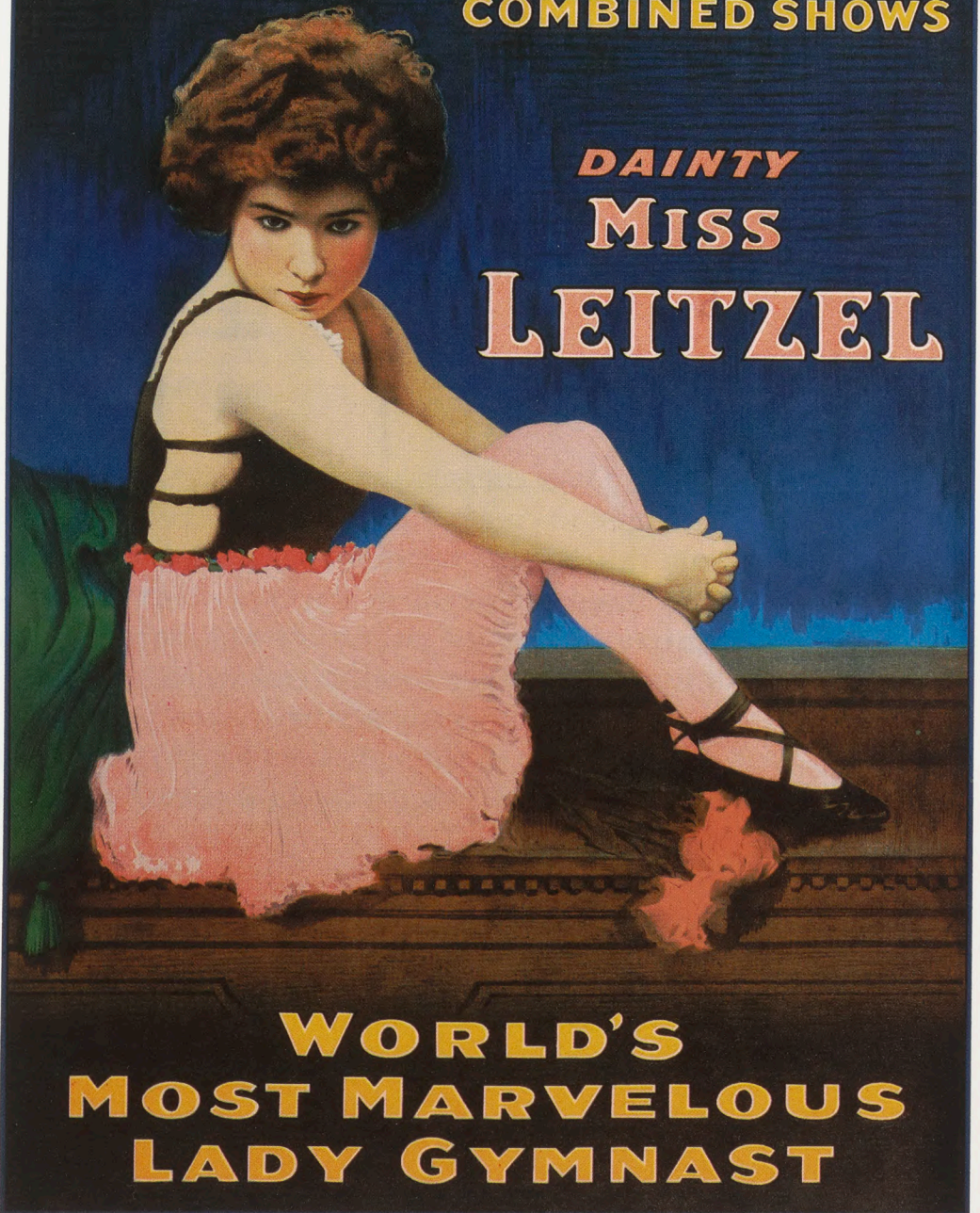
By
Susanne-Christine Voeltz

Over the years, countless artisans have been engaged to create the colorful posters, exquisite carvings and outrageous banners that promoted the excitement and magic inherent in the experience of the circus. The universal love for pageantry was infused with an inventive Yankee commercial spirit resulting in a vital, uniquely democratic aesthetic, and nurturing the development of three distinct forms of American folk art that were to become an integral part of the wonder that is the circus.

**RINGLING BROS
AND BARNUM & BAILEY**

COMBINED SHOWS

**DAINTY
MISS
LEITZEL**



147. Ringling Bros. & Barnum & Bailey Lillian Leitzel 1920

POSTERS

"Printers' ink has made the American circus. And mark you that I use the s-apostrophe. Because, you see, the circus utilizes all kinds of printing—the display advertisement in the daily and weekly newspapers; lithographs, for store windows and for the billboards of the cities, towns, and villages, as well as for the barns, sheds, and fences of the countryside; heralds, handbills, and booklets; cloth banners, for attaching to street cars . . . The circus uses all the mediums of printers' ink. And by that same token, the reputable, legitimate circus has always been able to fill its tents with patrons, its coffers with money."¹

The pictorial poster has its ancestry in the ancient wall paintings of Egyptian temples, the bas-reliefs of China, the engraved announcements of theatrical events in classical Athens, and in the pioneering advertisements of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The shop and inn signs and trade cards of the 17th and 18th centuries were also part of its heritage. However, it was not until the rise of the American circus that the poster reached its full potential as a merchandising tool and popular art form.

One of the earliest examples of the blatant advertising that was to characterize circus promotion is a broadside announcing the first appearance in America of an elephant (No. 105). It was printed in 1797 by the Providence, Rhode Island, firm of Carter and Wilkinson, one of the country's earliest commercial printers. John Carter, one of the partners, apprenticed in the Philadelphia shop of Benjamin Franklin and David Hall. The first elephant, obtained as a speculative venture in India by Captain Jacob Crowninshield, was brought to the New World and sold to a Welshman named Owen for the princely sum of \$10,000. Owen wasted no time in putting his expensive investment to work, escorting the pachyderm on an ambitious tour of appearances. At first, New Englanders willingly parted with their coins to simply gaze at the beast and watch it indulge its extravagant thirst for ale. The novelty apparently wore thin, for some 25 years later Owen presented his attraction under new billing as "the learned elephant". An 1822 handbill (No. 106) announcing the elephant's engagement in Chepachet, Rhode Island, touts the capability of this "most sagacious animal" to perform a series of entertaining tricks. Tragically, Chepachet was to be the pachyderm's last appearance, for a group of boys, intrigued by the keeper's

boast that his charge's hide was impenetrable, took aim at the beast; the bullet penetrated its eye, killing the elephant instantly.

The buildings that housed the first American circuses had become prohibitively expensive to maintain, and the early 1820's witnessed the emergence of touring tented shows. On becoming transient, circuses relied heavily on printed advertising to make pre-performance contacts with the public. Lone agents on horseback or mule, their saddlebags bulging with crudely printed posters and handbills, were dispatched a few hours in advance of a performance to the towns the shows were planning to play. Once there, they tacked the brightly colored announcements to trees and the walls of taverns and stores to entice their potential audience.

Partners John June, Lewis B. Titus, and Caleb Sutton operated a number of the early rolling enterprises; in 1839, they introduced the first circus combining both animal attractions and performers—an 1841 woodcut with handsome engravings of gymnasts and a giraffe vividly describes some of the shows exotic features which included Ethiopian dancers and cockatoos (No. 109).

One of the earliest large posters was produced for the Association Menagerie Pavilion in about 1835 (No. 107). The woodcut, advertising the "Anaconda Serpents of Java," measures approximately 6 1/2 feet in height and 5 feet in width. At the bottom of the poster is inscribed: "Printed Entire in Two Sheets by J.W. Bell on his Double Mammoth Napier Cylinder Press."

The cylinder press was one in a series of inventions that brought about sweeping changes in the art of printing, increasing printing speeds four-fold and making the production of large, multiple-sheet posters possible. The first workable cylinder press was developed in England about 1810, by Friedrich Koenig and was placed in service by *The Times* of London.

For most of the 19th century wood engraving was the most popular and least expensive medium for the reproduction of advertising art, including circus paper. The development by Joseph Morse in the 1830's of wood engraving utilizing low-cost pine blocks made color printing economically feasible and multi-color bills began appearing over the course of the following decade. Jules Cheret, the French lithographer, acknowledged his debt to the naive imagery and the

explosion of color in the early American woodcut circus posters.

"Cheret as a young man had worked in England as a lithographer for a perfume manufacturer and while there had chanced upon some American traveling circus posters. They had the charming gaiety of folk art, their message was limited to essentials, and above all they made abundant use of color. In his native France posters were still black and white and one can imagine that the colorful American versions must have made a deep impression on him. He became, in fact, the first French poster artist to make use of color out of doors. It is an intriguing thought that along with inspirations from such classic sources as Watteau and Tiepolo, Cheret's art owes a debt to American folk art imagery."²

It is quite possible that the show posters Cheret admired were those of the Howes and Cushing circus which had embarked in 1857 on a seven year tour of England.

During his stay in the 1860's Cheret had the opportunity to study major advancements in the art of color lithography, a field in which the English excelled. Armed with new knowledge and the memory of the colorful American woodcut posters he had seen, Cheret returned to Paris, and in 1869, produced his first poster, a spirited image of Lydia Thompson's performance in "Faust," which laid the foundation for his work throughout the 1870's and 1880's. Cheret created a key place for the artist in poster design; his explorations in the use of color, the flow of his lines, and the rhythm of his lettering revolutionized poster art.

Woodcut bills were printed well into the 1870's and 1880's, and Americans were considered the world's greatest wood engravers. Although the woodcut posters could be somewhat crude in draftsmanship, the brilliance and retentive powers of their colors more than compensated for that characteristic. An exacting routine for the manufacture of the woodcut bill was followed by the early printers wherein they would initially sketch the intended design in charcoal on 27 by 39" blocks that had been glued together to approximate the size of the poster.

"... After the circus owner approved the sketch the artist would then make a drawing on the blocks with black India

ink. Then all the wood except for the lines of the drawing was carved away. This left a black outline the equivalent of a black printing plate. From this black plate a proof was pulled onto another wooden block. This time the carver marked off all the areas he wanted in red; then all but those areas were carved away. . . . The process was then repeated for as many colors as were desired."³

Because ink came in a limited number of colors, the blocks were carved so that the inks printed over one another, yielding many additional shades. Tone and texture were achieved by the manipulation of the black lines to create angles and intersecting planes. Each color necessitated a separate run through the letterpress. It took nine or ten men approximately ten days to complete a five color, fifteen to twenty sheet poster.

The Buffalo, New York, firm of Warren & Johnson & Co., founded in 1861, and later known as the Courier Company, was a job printing establishment attached to the *Buffalo Courier*, and occupying one of the largest printing plants in the country. In order to compete with other show printers for the increasingly lucrative contracts offered by circuses for the production of promotional "paper," Courier converted part of its equipment from engraving to lithography, enabling it to offer a full range of printing services to circus proprietors. Courier did work for a number of circuses, including those of Buffalo Bill Cody, Barnum & Bailey and the Ringlings. A fine example of the company's craftsmanship and command of color is an 1870 woodcut (No. 112) called "Levitation."

A giant among the show printing houses flourishing in the 19th century, The Enquirer Printing Co. of Cincinnati, Ohio, still derives the major portion of its printing business from the seasonal orders of circuses.⁴ Founded in the early 1850's to generate additional revenues for its parent newspaper company, the Enquirer Job Printing Co. became the first show printer in the Midwest and a leader in the field.

While most printing companies had adopted zinc plate lithography early in the 20th century, the Enquirer shifted back to the wood-based letterpress system, a method it employed in its early days and still uses today. The man behind this radical decision, who purchased the firm from the Cincinnati Enquirer in 1889, was Henry Anderson, grandfather of the

Enquirer's present owner. Convinced by both the prohibitive expense of converting to zinc lithography and his belief in the continued viability of the letterpress market, Anderson reverted to the old printing process.⁵ Thus, after 1910, the Enquirer Company concentrated almost exclusively on the printing of show paper for which letterpress was particularly well suited. Much of the circus paper created by Enquirer today is produced from wood engravings dating back as far as the 1890's. Enquirer's Sixth Street plant evokes the spirit of a turn-of-the-century shop with a splendid collection of antique presses and drawers laden with ornate foundry and wood type; a tremendous sense of pride in the craft still pervades the family-run shop.⁶

The Enquirer Company had earned an outstanding reputation for its lithographic work before eliminating it altogether in the momentous decision of 1910. Particularly notable were its lithographs for Buffalo Bill Cody, who was known to exact some of the most extraordinary works from the foremost show printers of the time. After acquiring the company in 1889, Henry Anderson engaged Thomas Tully as his chief artist and designer. They both befriended Buffalo Bill and went on to create a number of billboard size posters to promote his Wild West attractions, including the 1898, 9 sheet, *Cody Shooting Glass Balls* (No. 129).⁷ Posters were comprised of some multiple of a standard 28 x 42" sheet and were produced in 1/2, 1, 2, 3, . . . 24, . . . 48 and upward sheet sizes with 16 being predominant for a typical billboard. It is the circus that is credited with the invention of billboards, and their early popularity was certainly, in large part due to Buffalo Bill who utilized them extensively.

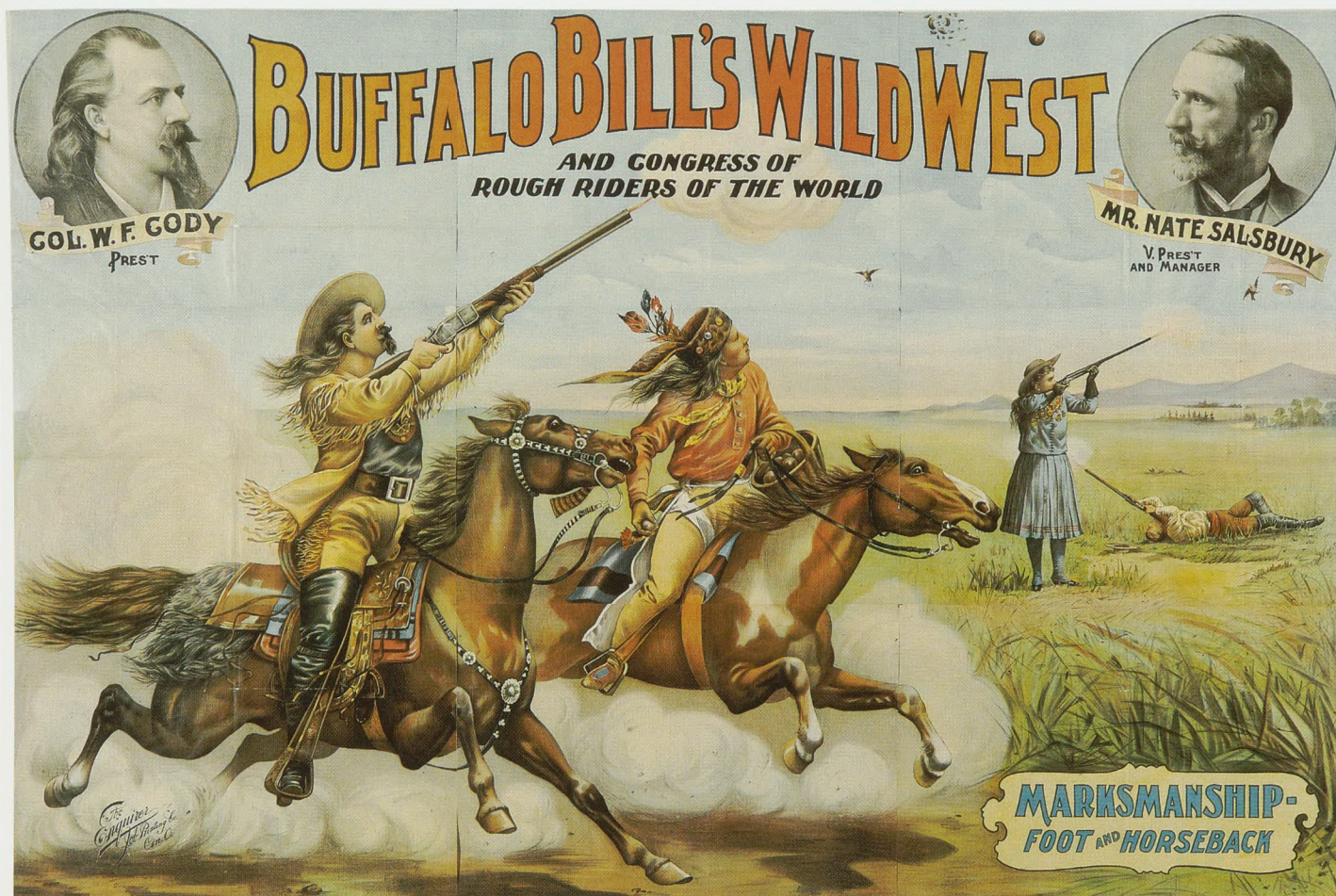
"Enquirer Job Printing Company of Cincinnati created some of the most beautiful lithography for Buffalo Bill; among them are some incredibly fine multiple sheets. In addition to many 28 sheets, they produced a spectacular 108 sheet billboard (8 sheets of text, 100 pictorial sheets, overall length of 91 feet), showing various scenes of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and advertised as 'the largest Poster ever printed.'"⁸

The first lithograph produced in America was an 1819 illustration for the *Analectic Magazine* by Otis Bass, a Philadelphia portrait painter. In the American lithographs of the 1820's and 1830's, colors were added freely by hand with

crayons, chalks and water paints. America's first chromolithographs, printed color lithographs whose images comprised at least three colors, each applied to the print from a separate stone, were printed in Boston by Walter Sharp in 1840. Although Alois Senefelder, discoverer of lithography, experimented with chromolithography very early in the 19th century, and had described how to do multi-color work, his methods were not extensively embraced until the 1850's. The lithographic print had real competition from the wood engraver, who had available great assortments of giant letters, large woodcut blocks, stock emblems and specially engraved pictures. It was not until the mature development of the chromolithographic technique and its wedding to the high speed steam press that lithography triumphed. The advantages of lithography, a printing process using a planographic plate and an inking principle based on the antipathy of grease to water, were many. Most importantly, it had become considerably cheaper than the wood engraving method. Lithography was also less restrictive, allowing printers to orchestrate a far wider range of tones, textures and colors than had been possible before. In addition, lithography eliminated the intricate and laborious task of translating the original design into a wood engraving: the lithographer's crayoned drawing onto the stone served as the reproductive graphic medium.

Cincinnati has had a long history as a center of lithographic production and had a substantial influence on America's commercial and cultural life.⁹ Endless streams of chromoed oil portraits, art reproductions, and cigar and soap posters have rolled off Cincinnati's presses, helping shape popular tastes and visual consciousness. It is, however, for the quality of their theatre and circus posters that the Queen City's lithographers were best known. Of the nearly one hundred Cincinnati firms involved in the printing of show bills, several, including The Enquirer Company and the Russell Morgan Co. (No. 134), which later merged into the United States Printing and Lithographic Co., reached national preeminence.¹⁰ But it was the Strobridge Lithographic Company of Cincinnati that came to be celebrated as the "Tiffany of lithographers."

Strobridge's history began in 1849, when Eliza C. Middleton, owner of a Cincinnati engraving shop and W.R. Wallace, a lithographer from Philadel-



129. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Cody Shooting Glass Balls 1898



134. Barnum & Bailey Family at Four Ring Circus 1907

phia formed a partnership, "Middleton & Wallace". In 1854, Hines Strobridge joined the firm and shortly thereafter, Wallace withdrew. The business became Middleton, Strobridge & Co., specializing in a general line of stationery, maps and "oil portraits." The portraits were printed on artists' canvas using ink ground in oil, and had the appearance of authentic oil paintings. During the Civil War the company created the first printed oil portraits of Washington, Lincoln, Grant and other national heroes. In 1867, the firm was incorporated as Strobridge and Company, and entered in the show-printing arena with the production of a poster for Dan Rice, America's foremost clown.

Strobridge's unparalleled reputation in fine lithography evolved from a philosophy adopted by the firm's management: "It costs just as much to display a cheap and ineffective poster as it does a strong and artistic one." The company's insistence on quality in coloring and design is exemplified in its ravishing portrayal of Lillian Litzel (No. 147). The exquisite line work and the lush pastel of the colors in the beautifully printed poster are a testament to the highly accomplished team of artists that Strobridge assembled to carry out its objectives.

"Strobridge was a sort of cradle for many of the more distinguished younger American artists, who as journeyman lithographers received their first training."¹¹

Matt Morgan, who headed the firm's art department in the early 1880's, enjoyed a multi-faceted career as a theatrical scene designer, panorama painter, cartoonist, correspondent, theatrical manager, and leading lithographer. Born to an English theatrical family, Morgan arrived in New York in 1873 to work for Frank Leslie's *Weekly*. Leslie had hoped Morgan's cartoons would provide competition to Thomas Nast, the famous caricaturist working for *Harper's*. Apparently Morgan's style of British satire was not to Yankee taste, and he joined Strobridge in 1878. Morgan's theatrical background had a decisive influence on his work; accustomed by the theatre to work in a large scale, his most pronounced achievement at Strobridge was the creation, in 1878, of the first 16-sheet lithograph. The expanded format was adopted with zeal by industry and showmen alike.

Another alumnus of Leslie's *Weekly* was Harry Ogden, who became Strobridge's chief layout man and sketch artist in the company's New York office in 1881. Ogden has been credited with the design of almost all of the circus posters the firm produced. In a 1940 article for the *Cincinnati Times Star*, James Strobridge praised Ogden's uncanny gift for design and his extraordinary command of perspective elements, much in evidence in Sells Brothers' *Wonderful Silbons* (No. 124) and *Three Ring Circus* (No. 121).

"Ogden was a fast worker and most painstaking about details. He would attend a dress rehearsal carrying a small sketchbook and such was his accuracy of line in these memoranda and so phenomenal his photographic mind that he would return to the studio and draw the act in every detail."¹²

The manufacture of circus lithographs at the Strobridge Company entailed a collaborative effort. Ogden would sketch the poster designs on 9 by 12 inch cards and indicate where the multiple sheets would be cut. The Cincinnati artists would then work up the billboards in a variety of sizes.

During the late 1880's Paul Jones, who came to Strobridge as a "black artist," one specializing in the black outlines that gave form and emphasis to the design, spent several years in Paris.¹³ It was the period when the French poster was flowering as an art form, a development stimulated by Cheret's work. The Austrian artist Alphonse Mucha, a strong force in the Art Nouveau movement, and Jones found that they shared a common interest in the paintings of Jean Paul Laurens and Fantin Latour. It is interesting to note that in 1896, Jones and Harry Bridwell, an expert letterer, were asked to execute a poster after a design by Mucha promoting Sarah Bernhardt's first American tour. The lithograph is among Strobridge Company's greatest artistic achievements. That Strobridge artists were mindful of the French poster can be discerned in a 1892 lithograph of equestrienne Polly Lee (No. 123). One version is ornately framed by a red, black and white Art Nouveau border.

It was the excellence of its craftsmanship coupled with the business acumen of A.A. Stewart, the company's amusement contractor for nearly forty years, that established Strobridge as the leading producer of theatrical and circus posters in

the country. The firm printed lithographs for many of the great circuses including those headed by Adam Forepaugh, the Sells Brothers and the Ringling Bros. But it was Strobridge's association with the Barnum & Bailey circus for which it printed more than fifty tons of circus paper, that reveals a special insight into the psychology behind the art of promotion. Nelson Strobridge, former president of the Strobridge Company, discussed the advertising practices of Barnum & Bailey in a 1931 interview in the February issue of *The Artist & Advertiser*:

"The printing of the millions of posterbills for the Barnum & Bailey circus... was looked after by Mr. James A. Bailey. He was fond of much detail in his posters. They should represent the whole show. His idea was that the presentation of all features of the show was the most effective advertising. Mr. Bailey's posters were so pictorial and comprehensive that when he took his circus to Germany back in 1890, the Germans used to take their families down to the billboard, look at the posters and finally conclude to go home as they had seen all the circus on the posters. Barnum, on the other hand, preferred to feature one special performer or subject such as Jumbo the Great Elephant."

Jumbo (No. 118), the great elephant which Barnum spirited away from the London Zoo in 1882 amid fervent protest by England's schoolchildren, was Barnum's greatest promotional achievement as a circus proprietor. Always fond of "turning every possible circumstance to my account," Barnum even managed to exploit Jumbo's untimely demise. The heartrending story of Jumbo's death while heroically rescuing a baby elephant from the path of a speeding train was generously circulated. Jumbo's remains were expertly prepared by a leading taxidermist and the cadaver went on tour with Barnum's circus for two years. The skeleton was presented to the Museum of Natural History in New York, and a poster was created by the Strobridge Company in its honor (No. 161).

In an era when a half dozen circuses might play a large town in a season, posters were the prime promotional weapon among the bitter rivals. Bills were tacked to every available outdoor space by bill posting crews that traveled by special railroad car, usually dispatched to a town

about two weeks before the show was scheduled to arrive. Bill posters were instructed to find suitable locations for the "art." To gain a competitive edge, billposting crews delighted in covering one another's work: a cushion of circus-bills in Sacramento was reputedly 28 layers thick. The billions of sheets of circus paper represented a considerable financial investment for show management. The most heavily promoted circus attraction since Barnum's Jumbo was the giant gorilla Gargantua, who was introduced to astonished crowds by John Ringling North in 1938. The sensational posters bearing Gargantua's likeness were to be among the last showbills printed at the Strobridge Company.

It should not be surprising that the circus exploited existing artistic canons and introduced radical new technologies in the production and dissemination of its posters, creating an extravagant and democratic folk art. In her introduction to Sterner's *Art of Revolution*, Susan Sontag succinctly characterizes the poster's function:

...the poster...presupposes the modern concept of the public, in which members of a society are defined as spectators and consumers...a poster aims to seduce, exhort, to sell, to educate, to convince, to appeal...a poster reaches out to grab those who otherwise might pass it by."

The circus poster has educated, documented, and promoted. But it is a highly original genre. Its distinguishing elements, abundance of colors, hyperbolic rhetoric and iconic message neither emerged nor were borrowed from other sources. The circus poster "is the modern technological expression of a traditional phenomenon organically linked to the circus itself."¹⁴

1. Sam Banks, "Printer's Ink Has Made the American Circus," *Printed Salesmanship*, Vol. XLVII, No. 2 (October 26, 1926), p. 1.
2. Edgar Breitenbach, *The American Poster: A Brief History* (New York: The American Federation of Arts and October House, 1967), p. 7.
3. John and Lilia Brady, "Woodcut Circus Posters & The Company that Made Them," *Poster Pal Catalog*, No. 1 (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1980).
4. Harry Anderson, Unpublished Interview, Cincinnati, Ohio: Enquirer Printing Co., November, 1980.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. Jack Rennert, *100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (New York: Darien House, 1976), p. 5.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
9. Peter Marzio, *The Democratic Art: Chromolithography 1840-1900* (Boston: D.R. Godine in Association with Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas, 1979), p. 130.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell, *Lithography and Lithographers* (London, England: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915), p. 221.
12. *The Strobridge Lithographing Company Papers, 1886-1937 and 1826-1977* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Cincinnati Historical Society).
13. John W. Merten, "Stone by Stone Along a Hundred Years with the House of Strobridge," *Bulletin of the Historical & Philosophical Society of Ohio* (January, 1950), p. 26.
14. Paul Bouissac, *Circus & Culture: A Semiotic Approach* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press), 1957, p. 177.

JUST RETURNED FROM AUSTRALIA

ROMAN HIPPODROME
3 RING CIRCUS
 TWO ELEVATED STAGES,
5 CONTINENT MENAGERIE
 IMPERIAL JAPANESE TROUPE

SELLS BROTHERS

COMBINED WITH **HASSAN BEN ALI'S MOORISH CARAVAN**
 ARABIAN NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENT
 AND SPECTACULAR **PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA**

20 YEARS BEFORE THE PUBLIC.

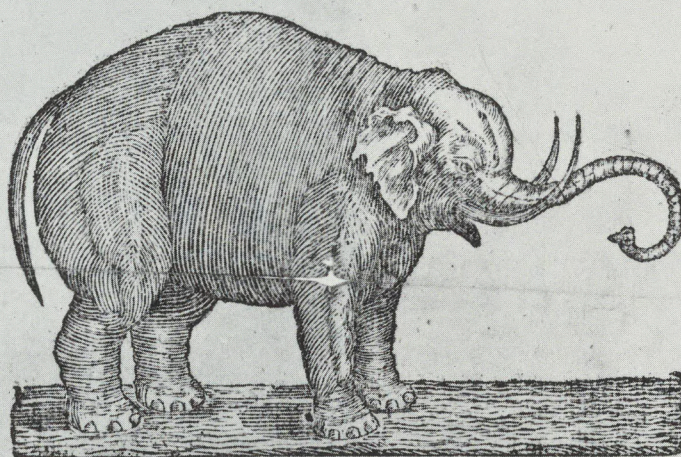
THE SUPREME TEST OF MERIT IS SUCCESS.

POLLY LEE THE UNDISPUTED AND UNQUESTIONABLE LEADING PREMIERE EQUESTRIENNE OF THE WORLD. = IN HER ABSOLUTELY UNAPPROACHABLE AND INIMITABLE GRAND PRINCIPAL ACT OF BARE-BACK RIDING.

123. Sells Brothers *Polly Lee* 1892



118. *Jumbo* circa 1882



T H E ELEPHANT.

ACCORDING to the Account of the celebrated BUFFON, is the most respectable Animal in the World. In Size he surpasses all other terrestrial Creatures; and, by his Intelligence, he makes as near an Approach to Man, as Matter can approach Spirit. A sufficient Proof that there is not too much said of the Knowledge of this Animal is, that the Proprietor having been absent for ten Weeks, the Moment he arrived at the Door of his Apartment, and spoke to the Keeper, the Animal's Knowledge was beyond any Doubt confirmed by the Cries he uttered forth, till his Friend came within Reach of his Trunk, with which he caressed him, to the Astonishment of all those who saw him. This most curious and surprizing Animal is just arrived from *Philadelphia*, on his Way to *Boston*.—He will just stay to give the Citizens of *Providence* an Opportunity to see him. He is only four Years old, and weighs about 3000 Weight, but will not have come to his full Growth till he shall be between 30 and 40 Years old. He measures from the End of his Trunk to the Tip of his Tail 15 Feet 8 Inches, round the Body 10 Feet 6 Inches, round his Head 7 Feet 2 Inches, round his Leg, above the Knee, 3 Feet 3 Inches; round his Ankle 2 Feet 2 Inches. He eats 130 Weight a Day, and drinks all Kinds of spirituous Liquors; some Days he has drank 30 Bottles of Porter, drawing the Corks with his Trunk. He is so tame that he travels loose, and has never attempted to hurt any one. He appeared on the Stage, at the new Theatre in *Philadelphia*, to the great Satisfaction of a respectable Audience.

✂ The Elephant having destroyed many Papers of Consequence, it is recommended to Visitors not to come near him with such Papers.

* * A Place is fitted up for him (suitable to receive genteel Company) in a Store back of the Coffee-House; where he will remain till the 8th of *July* only, as he is to be at *Cambridge* at the approaching Commencement.

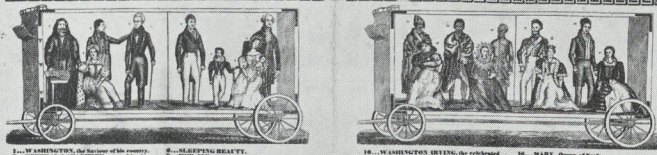
Admittance, One Quarter of a Dollar—Children, One Eighth of a Dollar.

Providence, June 27, 1797.

Printed by CARTER and WILKINSON.

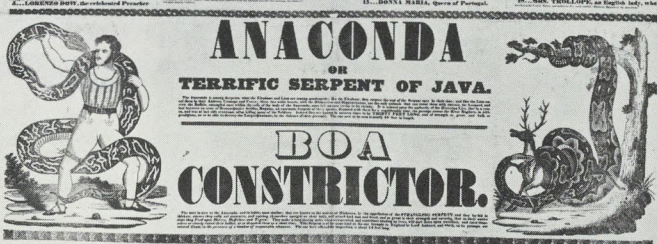
REPOSITORY OF NATURAL CURIOSITIES
AND A
MUSEUM
OF
FINE ARTS, CONSISTING OF EIGHTEEN WAX FIGURES AS LARGE AS LIFE.
THE SAME WILL BE EXHIBITED UNDER A
NEW PAVILION

DURING THE DAY TIME ONLY—ENTRANCE FROM THE FRONT OF THE ASSOCIATION MENAGERIE PAVILION.
WILL BE EXHIBITED BY ADMITTANCE 12 CENTS, CHILDREN UNDER 10 HALF PRICE.
NOTICE—Gentlemen are requested not to smoke in the Museum, as it is strictly against the rules of the Exhibition.



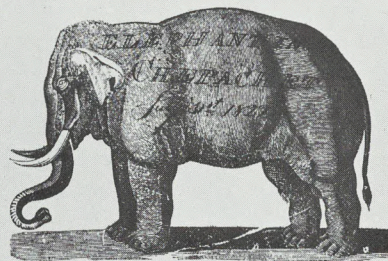
1.—W. AMSTUTTER, the discoverer of the country.
2.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
3.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
4.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
5.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
6.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
7.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
8.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
9.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
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11.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
12.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
13.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
14.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
15.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
16.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
17.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.
18.—AMSTERDAM, the discoverer of the country.

ANACONDA
OR
TERRIFIC SERPENT OF JAVA.
BOA
CONSTRUCTOR.



TO RENDER THE HUNTER THE MORE ATTRACTIVE, THE PROPRIETORS HAVE
Engaged Three Gentlemen from One of the Principal Theatres in the United States to Sing the
COMIC NEGRO SONGS OF
Jim Crow, My Long Tailed Blue, and Jim Brown.
DRESSED BY FIVE COSTUMES AS BORN NEGROES.
Printed in New York, by J. W. Bell, 17 Astor Street, New York, on the Double Hammer and Cylinder Press.

107. Association Menagerie Pavilion circa 1835

AN EXHIBITION.

OF A NATURAL CURIOSITY.

To be seen at *Webster's Book Store, Boston* on *Saturday, November*
the *21st* day of *July* 1822, for *one* day only.

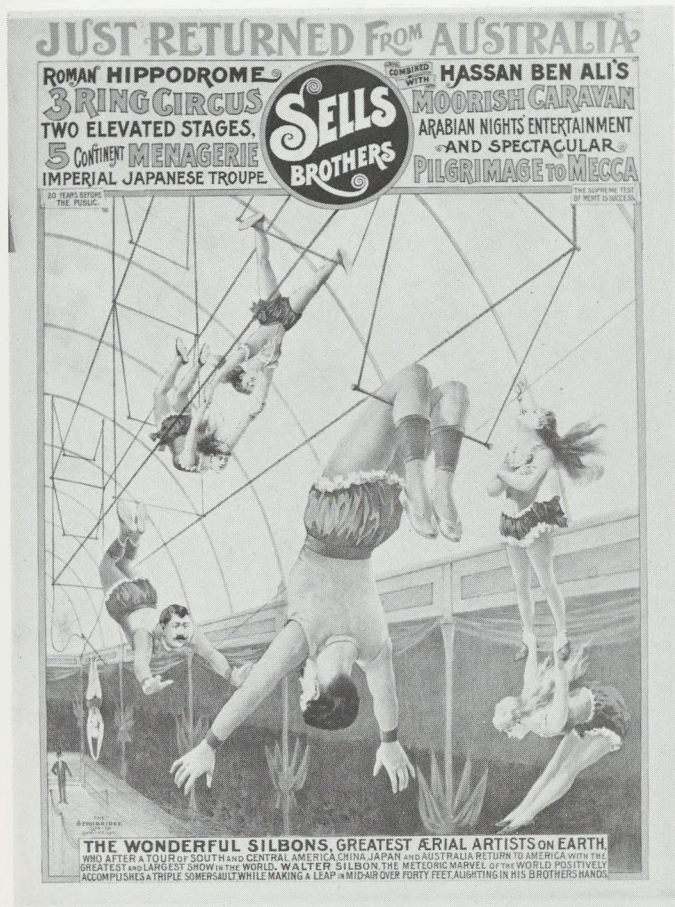
The Learned ELEPHANT.

Which for sagacity and docility, exceeds any one ever imported into this country, will go through her astonishing performances which have excited the admiration of every beholder. The Elephant is not only the largest and most sagacious animal in the world, but from the peculiar manner in which it takes its food and drink of every kind with its trunk, is acknowledged to be one of the greatest natural curiosities ever offered to the public. The one now offered to the curious, is a female twelve years old, she is seven feet six inches high, nineteen feet from the end of her trunk to that of her tail, twelve feet round her body, two feet ten inches round her legs, three feet two inches round her feet, and weighs between five and six thousand pounds. Some of the amusing exercises of this animal, are, to kneel to the company, balance her body alternately on each pair of legs, present her right foot to enable her keeper or any other person to mount her trunk, carry them about the room and safely replace them, draw a cork from a filled bottle and drink the contents, and then present the empty bottle and cork to her keeper. She will lie down, sit up, and rise at command, bows and whistles at request, answers to the call of her keeper, she takes from the floor a small piece of money with her trunk and returns it to her keeper, besides many other marks of sagacity. Those wishing to gratify their curiosity, may now have an opportunity.

Admittance 12 1-2 Cents. Children under twelve half price. Hours of exhibition from nine in the morning until five in the evening.

TRUE AND GREENE, PRINTERS, BOSTON.

106. The Learned Elephant 1822



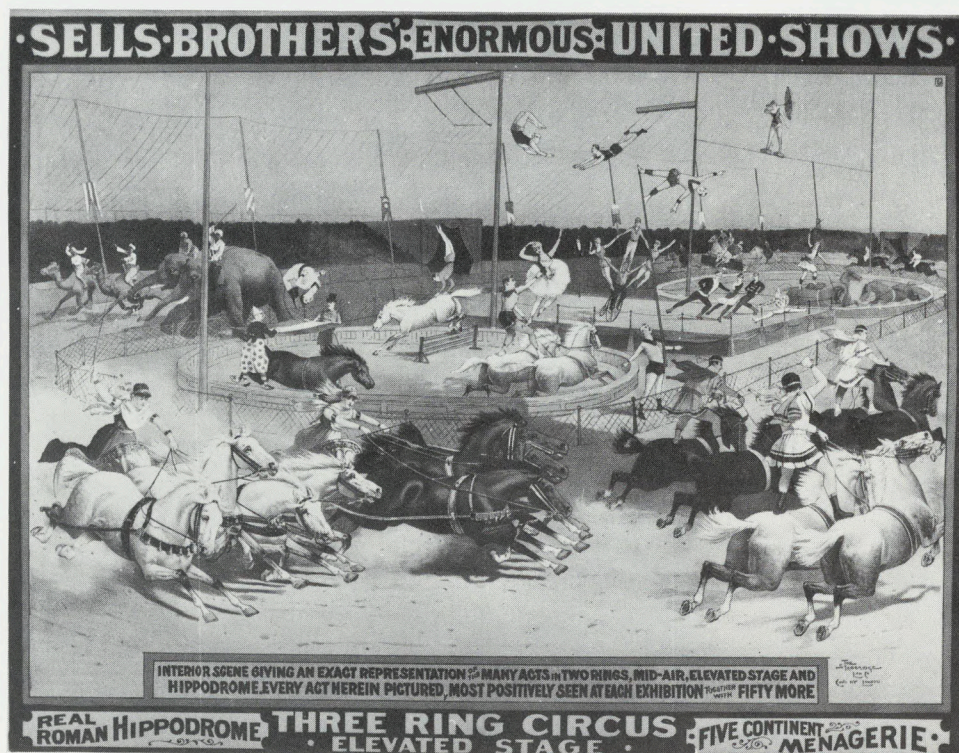
124. Sells Brothers *The Wonderful Silbons* 1892



112. *Levitation* 1870



119. Jumbo's Skeleton circa 1886



121. Sells Brothers Three Ring Circus 1888



Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus bill posters Sturtevant, Wisconsin 1949



165. *Wagon Side* from Sells Brothers Cage Wagon, circa 1880

WOOD CARVING

Wood carving has been a highly developed craft since ancient times. The first wood carvers in America were engaged by the burgeoning shipbuilding industry to supply the figureheads and symbolic scrolls that decorated the great wooden sailing vessels. By the close of the Civil War, the introduction of steam engines and iron hulls spelled an end to the production of wooden ships and barks, compelling the shipcarvers to seek new markets for their craft. Fortunately, the flowering of the American circus parade provided the artisans with the ideal vehicle to indulge their imaginations freely and exercise their finely-honed skills.

Traveling circuses emerged early in the 19th century and by the late 1820's some thirty small shows were moving through New England and the Atlantic states. The earliest circus parades were modest affairs, featuring several sparkling, horse-drawn wagons and a bugler on horseback who cried out the show's arrival. In 1837, the Purdy & Welsch circus introduced the first traveling band. An early woodcut illustration of a parade with twelve musicians on horses and elephants depicts the Purdy & Welsch spectacle, a forerunner of what was soon to evolve into a procession of baroque splendor.

Van Amburgh's "Triumphal Car," believed to be the first band chariot built for the circus, was crafted at John Stephenson's New York wagon works about 1845. A pair of handsome lions on the front of the elaborately carved chariot has been attributed to John Cromwell (1805-73).¹ Among Cromwell's apprentices were Thomas J. White (1825-1902) and Thomas Brooks (1825-1895), who became master practitioners of circus carving. "Daddy Brooks", as he was affectionately known, established a wood carving business in 1848, specializing in show and ornamental figures, and took on a young apprentice, Samuel Robb (1851-1928), who was to be regarded by the leading circus impresarios as America's premier wood carver.² During his apprenticeship with Brooks, Robb was encouraged to develop his talents by studying the fine arts, and he attended classes at the National Academy of Design and Cooper Union's School of Art. When Robb finally opened his own shop in 1876, the combination of his artistic training and technical expertise enabled him to meet the challenges posed by the ascendancy of the circus parade.

Seth Howes had taken his circus on a tour of England in 1857; upon his return seven years later, he brought with him some splendid telescoping tableaux, cleverly conceived English parade wagons, with huge allegorical carvings which could be mechanically raised as much as thirty feet from the wagon's bed. The telescoping tableaux's debut in America precipitated unprecedented growth in the scale and scope of the circus parade. Rivalry among showmen was keen, and the public judged a circus' worth by the size of its parades and the opulence of its richly carved and gilded wagons.

Thomas White joined Samuel Robb as an associate, and for some twenty years they performed magic with their mallets and chisels, transforming firm white pine into countless scrolls, awesome dragons, gargoyles, ferocious creatures in combat, jesters (No. 165) and historical and mythological figures. Their visual feast was ravenously consumed by the ecstatic public who lined the streets for the rolling art shows that were the American circus parades.

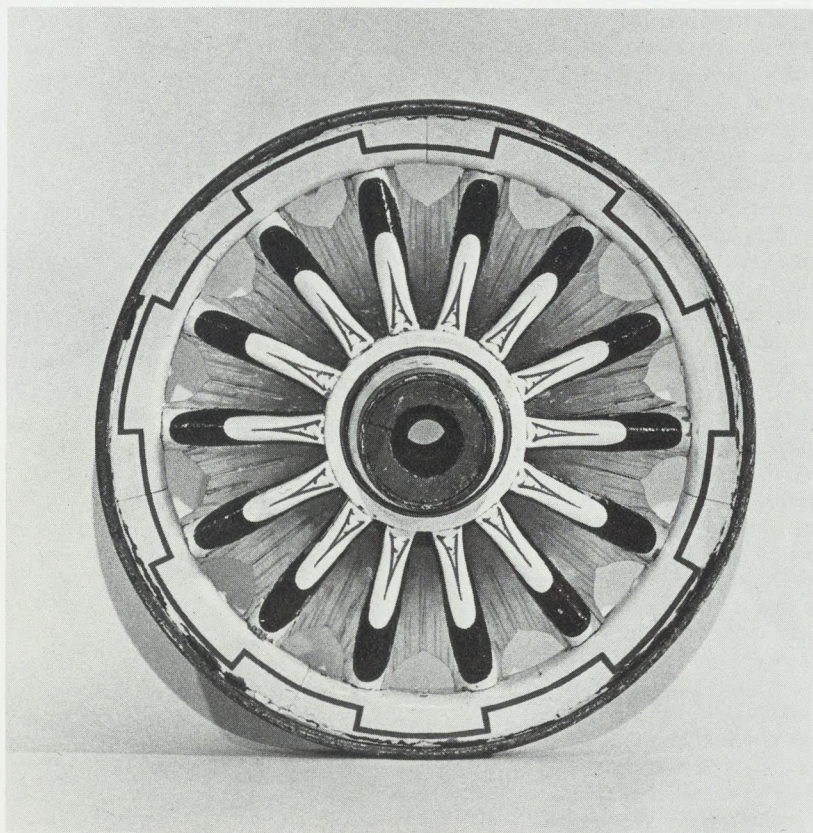
The carving of circus statuary (No. 168) required superb craftsmanship and care.³ Initially, a rough configuration of the design was blocked out on a log with the craftsman's axe; the carver would then translate the suggestions of the image into recognizable form. Finally, the figure was gessoed and gilded with tissue-thin sheets of goldleaf in a painstaking process involving special tools. On occasion, silver leaf was applied, but ordinary paint was never allowed to touch the surface of the carvings.

While America's wood carvers generated a legitimate folk art form, her wagon builders faced less high-minded concerns. The fantasy world created by the wagon's carvings obscured the massive construction of its undercarriage, which was deliberately over-engineered to withstand the abuse of constant movement. Among the foremost builders of the bandchariots, snake dens, cage wagons, historical tableaux and fairy tale floats that embellished the parades were the Fielding Bros. and the Sebastian Wagon Company of New York City, the Bode Company of Cincinnati, Biggs Wagon Company of Kansas City, and the Moeller Wagon Works of Baraboo, Wisconsin.

The parade wagon wheels, burdened with the considerable task of safely carrying performers, animals and valuable circus cargo along the parade

route, had to be sturdily fabricated, but they, too, were given artistic treatment (No. 166). Webs of wood were fitted into grooves cut into the spokes of the wheels and brilliantly painted in a radiating sunburst design, which, with the movement of the wheel, created a kaleidoscopic effect. The webbing also intensified the deep-throated knock of the heavy wheels caused by their slight lateral motion when they hit the axle housing: that distinct knock-knock sound of magnificent wagons rolling down Main Streets in big towns and small all but died with the fading of the street parade, returning only with the splendid reenactments of the glorious parades of yesterday that are staged from time to time by the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

1. Frederick Fried, *Artists in Wood* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1970), p. 179.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
3. Frank W. Weitenkampf, "Lo the Wooden Indian: The Art of Making Cigarshop Signs," *The New York Times* (August 3, 1890).



166. *Wagon Wheel*



168. *Statue of Lady from Beauty Tableau Wagon*



Gollmar Bros. parade 1910



"Popcorn George" W. Hall's Show circa 1900

BANNERS

At one time no self-respecting circus was without a sideshow, where the persuasive spiel of the sideshow "talkers" to "Step right up" rose above the din of the lions' roars, the elephants' trumpeting, and the hub-bub of the crowds. Drawn by the beguiling promises of this orator on his bally stand, the curious were enticed to part with their money and enter the sideshow tent past the "bigger than life, although rarely lifelike" oddities emblazoned along the banner line.

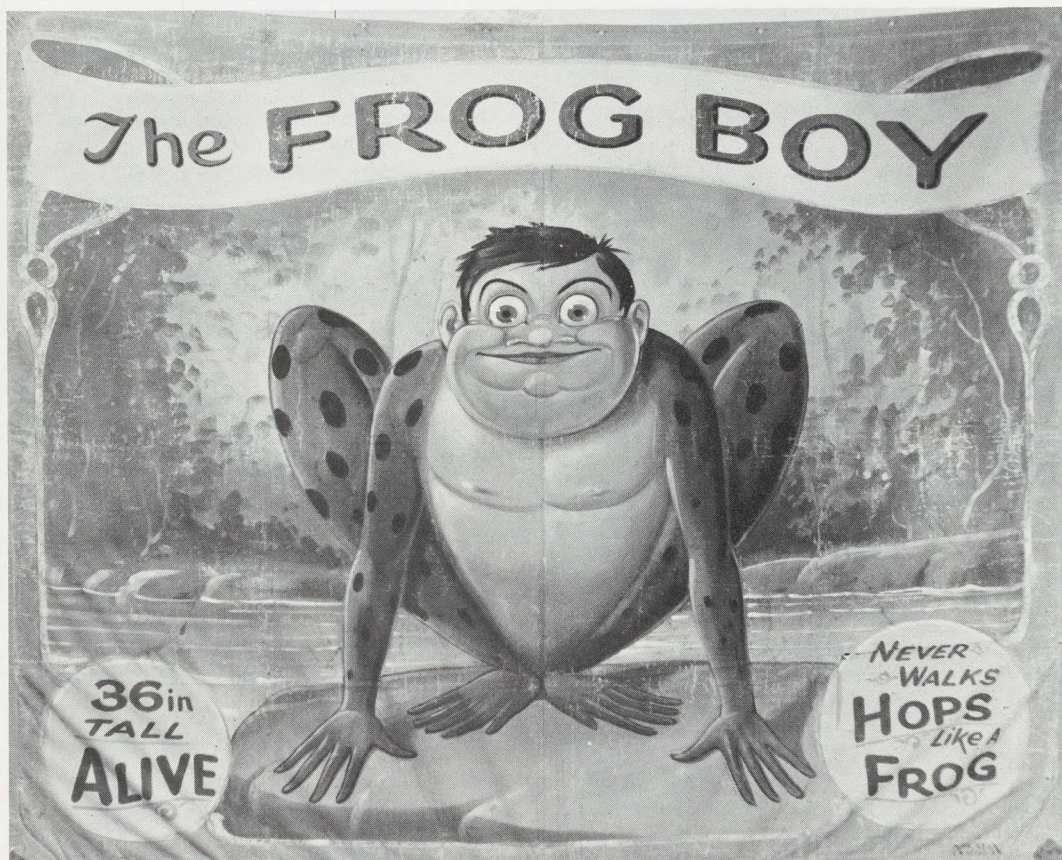
Fred Johnson, a banner painter for better than half a century, discussed his work in Fred and Mary Fried's *America's Forgotten Folk Arts*: "The secret of the banner art is color, and never mind if you exaggerate the subject matter. The idea is to attract attention. We call it flash." The two-headed cows, leopard girls and human skeletons depicted by leading painters of circus banners such as Johnson, Snap Wyatt and August

Wolfinger were, to a great extent, figments of their vivid imaginations. What the townspeople saw inside the sideshow tents seldom bore anything more than a remote connection to the preposterously exaggerated depictions on the banners. Perhaps out of their chagrin at having been "suckered" by the claims of the talkers and the lurid banners, few sideshow customers ever demanded their money back.

The story is told that "Popcorn George" W. Hall, a 19th-century circusman, would guarantee townspeople that if any of them left his tent of human and animal monstrosities feeling that they did not get their money's worth, he would personally see to it that they were satisfied. Now and then a disgruntled patron would march up to Hall after passing through his tent and make the claim that he was still not satisfied. Hall, remembering his promise, told him, "Well, go back inside and stay until you are."¹

It took a little more than one full working day to complete a standard 5 by 10 foot banner.² After stretching the canvas and tracing his design in charcoal, the artist outlined the figures in black ink. Color was then generously built up over a white lead base and the background was filled in. Banners were not varnished as paintings usually are, because such a coating would only stiffen the canvas, causing it to crack under the strain of handling. It is precisely due to the extravagant imaginations of the banner painters and the enduring quality of their craftsmanship that Dainty Dolly, Booptee, Thorn Girl and the Frog Boy (No. 177) are alive to this day.

1. Dean Jensen, *The Biggest, The Smallest, The Largest, The Shortest* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin House Book Publishers), p. 80.
2. Frederick and Mary Fried, *America's Forgotten Folk Arts* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 46.



177. Frog Boy

CATALOGUE: ARTIFACTS

All dimensions are in inches; height by width by depth.
An asterisk (*) indicates item is illustrated in the catalogue.

- *104. *Mr. Poole's Equestrian Feats of Horsemanship* 1786
Broadside, Carter Printers
13 3/4 x 7 3/4"
Lent by The Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island
- *105. *The Elephant* 1797
Broadside, Carter & Wilkinson
11 x 9 1/4"
Lent by The Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island
- *106. *The Learned Elephant* 1822
Broadside, True & Greene
16 x 12 3/4"
Lent by The Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island
- *107. Association Menagerie Pavilion circa 1835
Woodcut, J.W. Bell
77 1/2 x 56"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 108. *Astley, Wars of Spain* 1837
Herald
29 3/8 x 9 7/8"
Lent by Illinois State University Milner Library Circus Collection, Normal, Illinois
- 109. June, Titus & Angevine, *Menagerie & Circus* 1841
Woodcut
78 7/8 x 53 3/4"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 110. Bertolotto's Exhibition, *Flea Circus* circa 1842
Circus bill
6 5/16 x 4 3/4"
Lent by Illinois State University, Milner Library Circus Collection, Normal, Illinois
- 111. *Tom Thumb and Lavinia Warren* 1863
Herald
24 x 9 1/16"
Lent by Illinois State University, Milner Library Circus Collection, Normal, Illinois
- *112. *Levitation* 1870
Woodcut, Warren Johnson & Co.
56 3/4 x 41 1/2"
Lent by The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- 113. *The Lion Queen* 1874
Lithograph, Gibson & Co.
22 1/4 x 28 1/4"
Lent by The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- *114. *The Grand Layout* 1874
Lithograph
28 x 40"
Lent by The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- 115. P.T. Barnum & The Great London Circus, *Chang the Chinese Giant* circa 1880
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
48 x 14"
Lent by Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Columbus, Ohio
- 116. Shelby, Pullman & Hamilton United Mastodon Shows, *Seven Southerland Sisters* 1881
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
20 1/4 x 30 1/4"
Lent by Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Columbus, Ohio
- 117. W.W. Cole, *Educated Ponies* circa 1875
Woodcut
21 1/4 x 27 1/4"
Lent by Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Columbus, Ohio
- *118. *Jumbo* circa 1882
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
28 x 38"
Lent by Private Collection, New York, New York
- *119. *Jumbo's Skeleton* circa 1886
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
40 1/2 x 30"
Lent by The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- 120. Barnum & Bailey, *Human Cannon* 1888
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
81 11/16 x 111 5/16"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- *121. Sells Brothers, *Three Ring Circus* 1888
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
28 x 42"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 122. Barnum & Bailey, *7 Open Dens* 1890
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
83 1/4 x 149 9/16"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- *123. Sells Brothers, *Polly Lee* 1892
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
42 x 28"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- *124. Sells Brothers, *The Wonderful Silbons* 1892
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
42 x 28"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 125. Forepaugh & Sells, *Living Statues* 1896
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
28 x 42"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 126. Barnum & Bailey, *Equestrienne* 1897
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
42 x 28"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 127. Barnum & Bailey, *Two Living Human Prodigies* 1897
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
42 x 28"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 128. Ringling Bros., *Aviary & Aquarium* 1898
Lithograph, The Courier Co.
28 x 84"
Lent by Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Columbus, Ohio
- *129. Buffalo Bill's Wild West, *Cody Shooting Glass Balls* 1898
Lithograph, Enquirer Job Printing Co.
83 x 123 3/8"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 130. Barnum & Bailey, *Barnum & Bailey* 1898
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
42 x 28"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 131. *The Peerless Prodigies of Physical Phenomena* 1898
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
30 x 39 7/8"
Lent by The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- *132. Forepaugh & Sells Bros., *Flights over Elephants* 1899
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
28 x 42"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- 133. Ringling Bros., *Ringling Bros.* 1905
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
83 1/4 x 40 1/16"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
- *134. Barnum & Bailey, *Family at Four Ring Circus* 1907
Lithograph, Russell, Morgan & Co.
27 x 40"
Lent by Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Columbus, Ohio

135. Ringling Bros., *Automobile Double Somersault* 1908
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
28 x 42"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
136. Barnum & Bailey, *Terrible Leap for Life* 1909
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
42 x 28"
Lent by Dean Jensen, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- *137. Forepaugh & Sells Bros., *Aerial Butterflies* 1910
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
42 x 28"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
138. Barnum & Bailey, *Rare Zoological Features* 1911
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
42 x 28"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
139. Barnum & Bailey, *By the Hair of their Heads* 1916
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
42 x 28"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
140. Ringling Bros., *Cinderella* 1916
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
55 1/16 x 38 3/4"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
141. Barnum & Bailey, *The Hannefords* 1916
Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
28 x 42"
Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
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Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
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143. Barnum & Bailey, *Pallenberg's Bears* 1916
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42 x 28"
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Lithograph, The Strobridge Lithographic Company
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Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin

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Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo,
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Lent by Circus World Museum, Baraboo,
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